Spring 2006

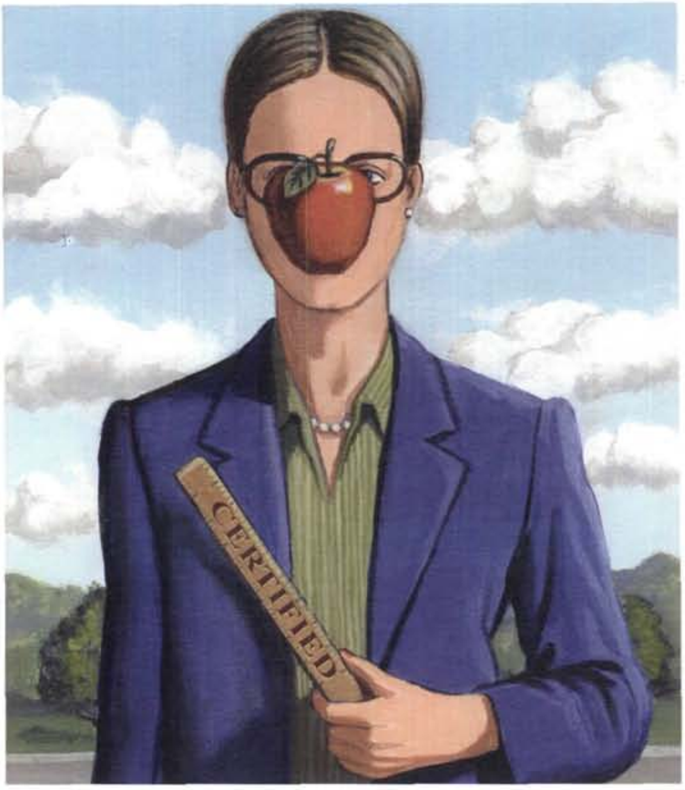
EDUCATION next

A JOURNAL OF OPINION AND RESEARCH

In Search of the Qualified Teacher

Certificates, Principals, Money, and Markets

MICHAEL PODGURSKY • BRIAN JACOB • LARS LEFGREN



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Our Schools in the Year 2030, Education Entrepreneurs, Florida's Program to End Social Promotion, Jonathan Kozol Off the Pedestal, Stories from Inside High School, The Virtual Revolution

CONTRIBUTORS: CHRIS WHITTLE, HENRY LEVIN, WILLIAM BOYD, JILLIAN REESE, JOE WILLIAMS, JAY GREENE, MARCUS WINTERS, RANDALL GREENWAY, GREGG VANOUREK, DAVID FERRERO

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The New Realism

Our only antidote to Islamic radicalism and terror

For all the media hysteria and the indisputable errors of implementation, the Bush Doctrine is, in fact, moving ahead. I continue without reserve to support our efforts in Afghanistan and Iraq and our pressure for reform in the Middle East at large. Not because the Bush Doctrine follows some predetermined neoconservative agenda—I thought the January 28, 1998, letter by the Project for the New American Century, urging the removal of Saddam Hussein, was ill-conceived at the time—but rather because, in a post-9/11 age, muscular idealism is the new American realism, the one antidote to Isalmic radicalism and its appendages of terror.

—Victor Davis Hanson

Katrina and School Vouchers

How to rebuild New Orleans's schools—and transform the city's system of education

Most New Orleans schools are in ruins. This is a tragedy. It is also an opportunity to reform the educational system. Rather than simply rebuild the destroyed schools, Louisiana, which has taken over the New Orleans school system, should empower parents by providing them with vouchers. Parents would then be free to choose the schooling they considered best for their children. Such a reform would meet emergency needs: Vouchers would be usable by the students who are now scattered all over the country to purchase educational services wherever they are. More important, the vouchers would encourage private enterprise to provide schooling. Is there any doubt that the private market would provide schooling for children returning to New Orleans faster than the state?

—Milton Friedman

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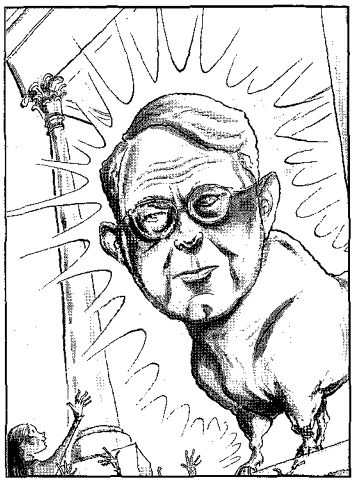

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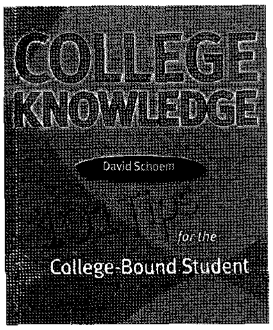

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101 Tips for the College-Bound Student

David Schoem

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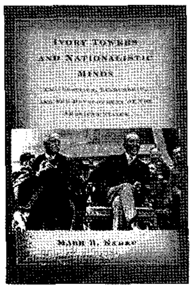

Ivory Towers and Nationalist Minds

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Mark R. Nemec

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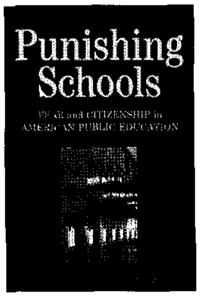

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Fear and Citizenship in American Public Education

William Lyons and Julie Drew

"The authors move back and forth convincingly between the micro-politics of school discipline and the 'politics writ large' of the liberal left and the utopian right. The result is an expansive, idealistic, and well-grounded book in the spirit of the very best of social control literature."
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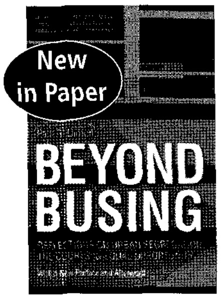

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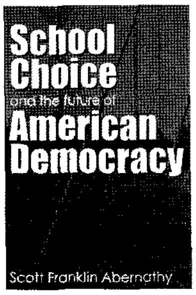

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Patricia Gurin, Jeffrey S. Lehman, and Earl Lewis

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Ann Arnett Ferguson

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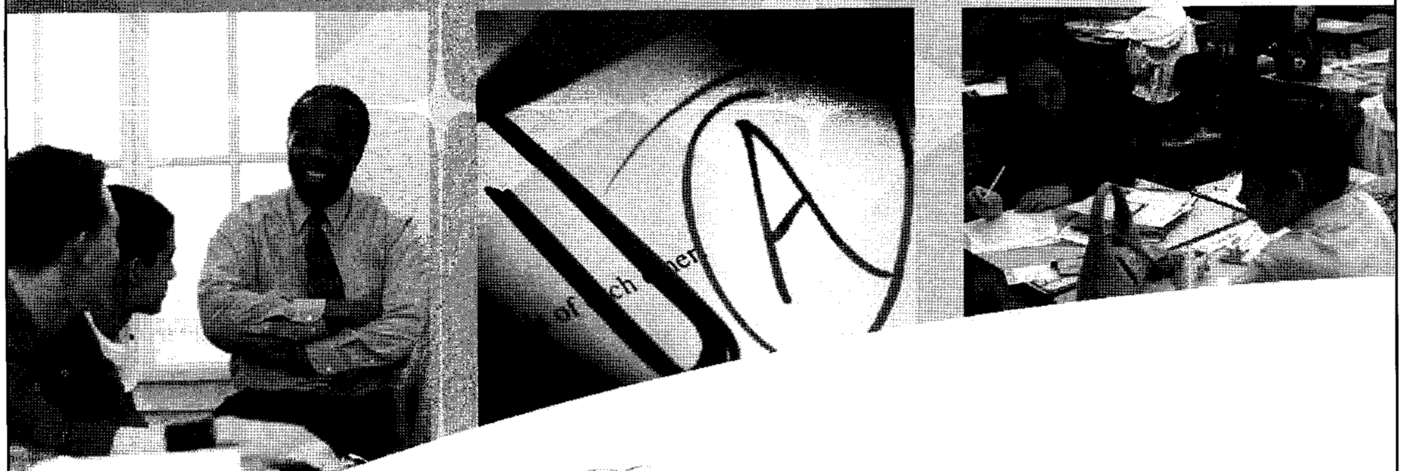

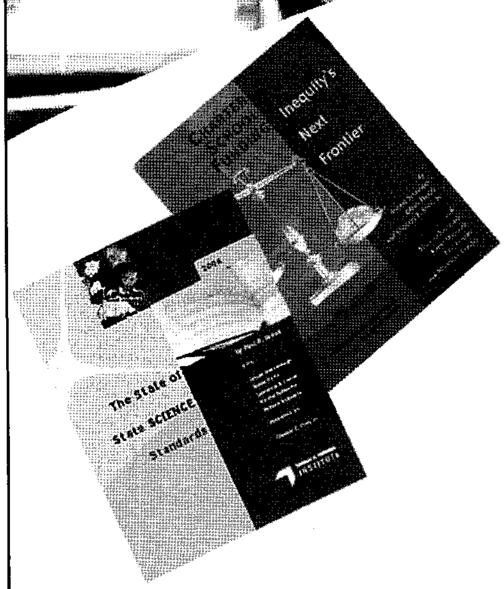
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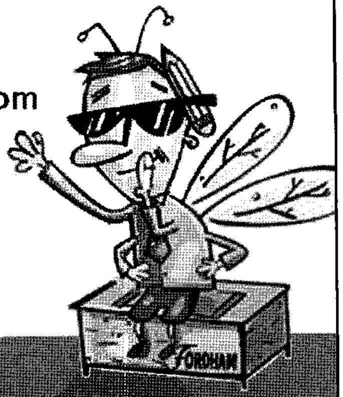

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Of Teacher Shortages and Quality

Now that we can identify good teachers, let's reward them

Good teaching—the kind that can routinely raise student achievement—is the most valuable of all education resources. When a teacher inspires, children learn, even when the building is antiquated, the Internet is missing, and classes are bigger than usual.

So teacher quality matters. A lot. Yet the standard measure of quality today, the teaching credential or license, is no sign of quality. A man may carry a driver's license in his wallet, but that does not mean he will stay in his lane. Similarly, we are not guaranteed an effective teacher because of a license verifying that he or she has passed a batch of education-school courses and spent a few months practice-teaching.

The standard measure of quality today, the teaching credential or license, is no sign of quality.

Still, states continue to require one or another of literally dozens, even hundreds, of different education credentials for each and every subject. In the process they have managed to manufacture an apparent shortage of "qualified," that is, credentialed teachers. On this matter, Michael Podgursky ("Is There A 'Qualified Teacher' Shortage?," page 26) provides fascinating information from the state of Missouri.

All this focus on credentials obscures the genuine shortage of an adequate number of truly qualified teachers: those who can help students realize their full potential. By paying teachers according to their credentials and the number of years they have been on the payroll rather than how well their students perform, the rewards go to the credentialed careerist, not necessarily to the meritorious teacher. And when talent is not rewarded, talented people turn to other fields of endeavor, all the more so in an age when able women have many new career opportunities.

Attempts to introduce merit pay have been effectively thwarted by strenuous union opposition. Unions argue that one cannot easily distinguish between a good teacher and a bad one. While that may once have been the case, many districts and states are now collecting information on student performance in such a way that principals and superintendents can track how much a given child is learning from one year to the next, and from one teacher to the next.

That information can be a powerful tool for identifying effective teachers. Brian Jacob and Lars Lefgren ("When Principals Rate Teachers," page 58) show that teachers that were effective with last year's class will tend to be effective this year as well. By the same token, teachers who have never been effective are not likely to become so. To those who remember the great teachers they had in school, the finding may appear obvious. It is all the more distressing that teacher pay schedules ignore it.

The Jacob-Lefgren study also shows that school principals are good at identifying the very best teachers as well as the weakest ones, exactly the capability needed to reward the topflyers while weeding out those who belong in another profession.

To its credit, as William Boyd and Jillian Reese tell us in their feature essay ("Great Expectations," page 50), the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) has tried to enhance teacher quality. And the certification process seems to be able at least to identify more effective teachers. Perhaps NBPTS-certified teachers deserve an extra reward, if they go to the effort of applying for and then actually passing their "boards." But so far, the jury is still out on whether the program helps create good teachers or simply spots the existing ones.

The solution to the so-called shortage of qualified teachers may well lie with more commonsensical solutions. Let principals, themselves to be chosen for their effectiveness, recruit, reward, and retain the truly qualified teachers. That is no different from the personnel policies followed by successful firms in competitive industries.

Once talented teachers are so recognized—and paid according to their effectiveness—there is no reason not to compensate them a lot better than they are today. It is true that teachers' weekly compensation packages are, on average, often better than in other professions. But students could learn a lot more, and teachers could be paid a lot more, if schools paid bigger salaries to the best and the brightest, but not to the ineffective.

— Paul E. Peterson

MISSION STATEMENT In the stormy seas of school reform, this journal will steer a steady course, presenting the facts as best they can be determined, giving voice (without fear or favor) to worthy research, sound ideas, and responsible arguments. Bold change is needed in American K–12 education, but *Education Next* partakes of no program, campaign, or ideology. It goes where the evidence points.

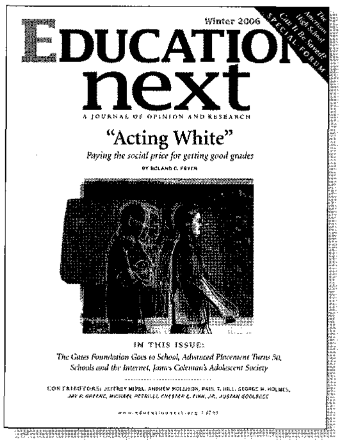
"Acting White"

Roland Fryer's research reported in the last issue of *Education Next* ("Acting White," *research*, Winter 2006) uses a large nationally representative data set and innovative statistical methods to show convincingly that black students in racially integrated public schools have fewer friends if they earn A's than if they earn B's. He defines this finding as evidence of "acting white." The findings are important, but they may or may not be due to acting white (or the social dynamics surrounding the accusation) as people usually define it. Last spring (after debating Fryer about his definition), I included the following question on a survey to which several thousand students across several school districts responded: "At this school, people like me get accused of acting white." Preliminary analysis shows patterns that are fascinating. It appears that accusations of acting white really are a problem and could be part of the explanation for Fryer's findings concerning popularity, but the patterns are more nuanced than people might expect.

Ronald F. Ferguson
Senior Research Associate
Harvard University

The notion that black students engage in academic self-sabotage because of fear that they will be subjected to taunts from their same-race peers, as Roland Fryer writes, is to attribute racial inequality to black dysfunctionality. This is no different than the perspective William Ryan years ago astutely labeled "blaming the victim." Its propagation absolves the researcher and the policymaker from looking at deep-seated structural and institutional practices that perpetuate racial disparities.

Fryer's study treads gingerly on the victim-blaming field. Constructively, his work indicates that to the extent that a burden of acting white exists, it is not universal. He finds no evidence of such a phenomenon, for instance, for black students in predominantly black high schools. This is especially intriguing, since, in the original construction of the claim, Signithia Fordham and John Ogbu professed to have found the phenomenon of racialized harassment for black high achievers in an all-black high school in Washington, D.C. However, if one looks carefully at their 1986 *Urban Review* paper, none of the student narratives they report makes any reference to a fear of being accused of being a race traitor. Their respondents do express an aversion to being called a "brainiac," but this is absolutely no different from white high achievers not wanting to be called "nerds" or "geeks."



Winter 2006
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A JOURNAL OF OPINION AND RESEARCH
"Acting White"
Paying the social price for getting good grades
BY ROLAND G. FRYER

IN THIS ISSUE:
The Gates Foundation Goes to School, Advanced Placement Turns 50, Schools and the Internet, James Coleman's Adolescent Society

If popularity measures are indicators of the presence of a burden of acting white, then Fryer's finding is no surprise to those of us who have studied the subject. What is missing from his study, however, is information about the racial composition of the most-advanced classes offered by the schools in the Adolescent Health data. Research that colleagues and I have conducted indicates that when a burden of acting white develops, it occurs in a specific context, a school that is desegregated at the facility level, but has a segregated curriculum due to racialized tracking. The one or two black students who find their ways into Advanced Placement or Honors classes may well be subjected to racialized harassment from black peers who are outside of those classes—classes that appear to be the property of white students. School practices with respect to race and class assignment produce the burden of acting white, not attitudes that black students hold regardless of the type of school they attend.

What becomes critical is to understand the processes that lead to a segregated curriculum or the exclusion of black students from AP and Honors classes. Those processes find their origins in the elementary-school years with the extreme underidentification of black students for gifted and talented programs. Those are the processes generating schooling inequality that merit far more attention than the alleged burden of acting white.

William Darity Jr.
Professor of Economics
University of North Carolina
at Chapel Hill

Saving High School

The American High School: Can It Be Saved?" Despite the alarmist title and even more clever-but-frightening illustrations in this *forum* (Winter 2006), the answer that your authors [Jeffrey Mirel, Jay Greene, and Chester Finn Jr.] give seems to be "yes," or at least, "maybe."

We agree that big changes are needed. But the problems in American education are so varied and so complex—our nation is so varied and so complex—that we cannot find a single persuasive, agreed-upon analysis of the problem. So we rush into "solutions," and when they don't "work" for every one of every child's problems, we declare the solution a failure.

American education has always had two passions: for excellence and for equity. Excellence in the Committee of Ten era meant singular coherence, so that the many new high schools being provided would know what to teach, so that their graduates would be admitted to college. Today, excellence is often described as college admission, especially to selective colleges, but is also likely to be described as being "competitive with the world's standards," chiefly as seen in test scores. That's where equity comes in. If all we had to do as a nation was to fill up selective colleges with bright, skillful students, a number of us might consider our "problem" solved, especially if we were the parents of those students. However, we have many more students than that, and they have to create decent adult lives for themselves in an economy that will make new demands on its workers. Moreover, at a time when democracy itself is embattled by those who are bent on fooling rather than informing the electorate, we need to take our, and their, roles as citizens seriously.

Equity is unlikely to arise from the aping of the Committee of Ten or even its watering down. Instead, it is the careful rethinking of exactly what a young adult needs to know, not only to go to college, but to live a worthy life: which skills, taken to which level, and which content, taken to which depth. Instead of the sense that each child should be stacked up against all others in a battle of memory and speed, we tend to think in terms of value added. Does she read more skillfully this year than last year? Might we, every year, tape-record a session in which she reads and explains what she has read? Would we know how to assess such a performance? Would that tell us more about what we and she want to know?

There we go, being Progressive again. We would like to include some joy in these places of learning, and we believe that each will enhance the other. Rather than boredom and, worse, fear in that journey, there is joy for both student and teacher. It is individual, time-consuming, frustrating at times, and worthwhile. It may look messy to some. To us it is, on the deepest level, the only orderly way to proceed.

THEODORE R. SIZER
NANCY FAUST SIZER
Harvard Graduate School of Education

Instead of the sense that each child should be stacked up against all others in a battle of memory and speed, we tend to think in terms of value added. Does she read more skillfully this year than last year?

A single American high school would be a novel concept. And the arguments made in the Winter 2006 *forum* are undeniably valuable to the dialogue about high-school reform. However, the debate about the current status of the high school assumes that a single American high school really exists.

In fact, secondary education in the United States is so complex that we have not resolved the question of a single high school in more than a century of trying. Chester Finn hits the exposed nerve when he says a lack of "common metrics by which to gauge progress" is the real culprit. Dr. Richard Thomas, executive director, the School Administrators Association of New York State, says, "NCLB is necessary, but not sufficient."

Although they must be given, tests are just the tip of the iceberg. Unfortunately, I am not convinced that we possess the national will to look below the surface at what is drawing student achievement down. If we can't agree on testing, I am convinced we won't broach the meatier issues affecting high-school students.

As I think about what I accomplished today, as a high-school principal, I can say that I got into two classrooms, barely. My day began with an emotionally disturbed girl who had been raped by a family friend, another girl upset at being called a baby killer by a student who found out about her abortion, a parentless boy caught smoking . . . and that was before first period. Reform that scenario, and high-school achievement will follow!

JAMES D. DONNELLY JR.
Principal, James A. Greene H.S.
Dolgeville, New York

Underground Education

I was impressed by James Tooley's story on private schools in developing countries ("Underground Education," *features*, Fall 2005). It is an exemplary case of field research, which tells us two key things: official statistics on school enrollment in less-developed countries neglect the informal sector of education; and students from informal schools outperform students from formal schools, either public or private.

I prefer to use "informal" sector rather than "private" sector because we are not dealing with a traditional market for education. Most of the unrecognized schools visited by Tooley's research team probably do not pay taxes, which could help explain their economic viability. Also, public schools could be more expensive than informal ones if we take into account transportation costs, clothes, and books. It's also possible that poor families are more likely to be excluded when scarce slots are filled at the public schools.

Another explanation for the viability of informal schools in these countries is an excess supply of teachers: if teachers' unemployment drives their "reservation wage" down far enough, given the minimal investment in buildings, there is a possibility of making a living by supplying teaching services in the market.

None of this explains these schools' better performance, however. Professor Tooley's comparisons adjust statistically for differences in students' background characteristics. Although unobserved differences in student ability alone do not offer a satisfactory explanation for his findings, one alternative involves parental motivation. If poor parents sacrifice to send their children to school, they must be confident in the validity of the investment, and the child feels the corresponding pressure to make good on the investment.

Daniele Checchi
Professor of Labor Economics
University of Milan–Italy

Charter School Research

Has *Education Next*'s confidence in charter schools as a promising school-reform strategy evaporated? It's hard to imagine another explanation for Marci Kanstoroom's preemptive strike against the major federal charter schools research study currently in the field ("Looking in the Wrong Place," *from the editors*, Fall 2005).

Kanstoroom is concerned that the study examines only students in middle school and excludes those in elementary schools. The reason for this decision is clear enough: because of the study's randomized field-trial design, the researchers needed to establish a baseline at the grade when students enter the charter school. Thus including elementary schools would mean studying, and testing, kindergartners. Because states don't test these young students, the researchers would have to do so themselves, which would add significantly to the cost of a study whose expenses already number in the multiple millions.

So what's wrong with examining middle schools? Kanstoroom's first argument is that they represent "only 20 percent" of the nation's 3,400 charter schools. But the proportion of students in middle schools is the same for regular public schools as for charter schools. By Kanstoroom's logic, we should never study regular middle schools either.

She also argues that "two studies appear to confirm that charter schools are most effective for students who enter at an early age." Set aside for a moment that these two studies, no matter how rigorous, can't come close to settling such an important policy question. What if Kanstoroom is right? Should state legislators amend their laws to outlaw all charters except those starting with kindergarten? Should we shut down every KIPP middle school in the country?

If poor parents sacrifice to send their children to school, they must be confident in the validity of the investment.

Kanstoroom is right that "no single study will ever tell us about all charter schools," and this federal effort is no exception. It's not perfect, and its designers faced tough choices and trade-offs. Still, it is the first-ever large-scale effort to apply randomized field trials to charter schools. We'll learn a lot from it; maybe even that middle-school charters can be effective, after all.

Michael J. Petrilli
Vice President
Thomas B. Fordham Foundation

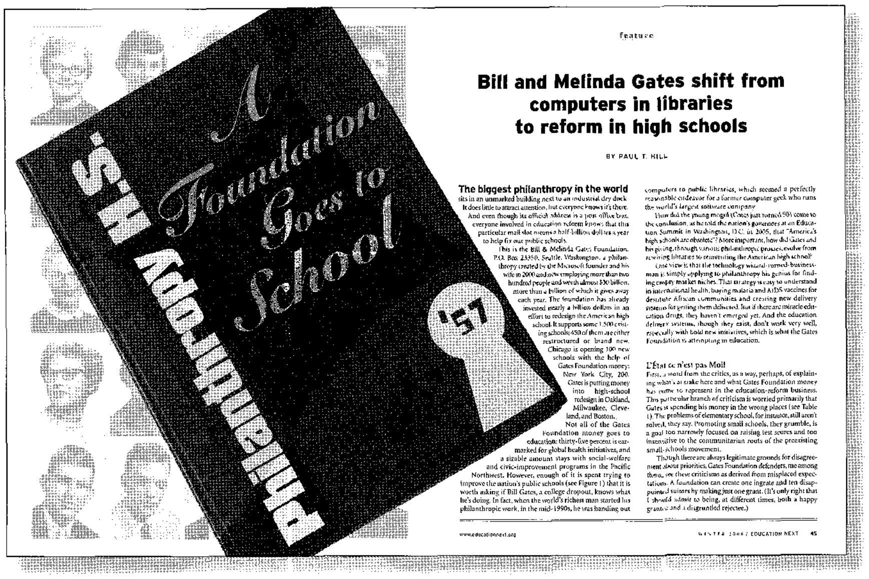
Marci Kanstoroom replies:
Mike Petrilli is, of course, correct that we are likely to learn a good deal about the effectiveness of charter middle schools from the study I criticized. But the study, which the U.S. Department of Education calls the "Evaluation of the Impact of Charter School Strategies," is the federal government's one and only multimillion-dollar effort to evaluate charter schooling as an innovation. Focusing this national evaluation on charter middle schools—which research already suggests are weaker than charter schools admitting younger students—is akin to reviewing a restaurant after sampling only its soups.

The Gates Foundation

I respect Paul Hill and his work. However, he mistakenly interprets the Gates Foundation's new direction ("A Foundation Goes to School," *features*, Winter 2006) as a move away from the ideas of "Progressives" and a victory for the moderates/conservatives. I do not speak for the Gates Foundation, but from my vantage point, Tom Vander Ark [director of the foundation's education programs] and his staff have always been highly eclectic and pragmatic in their grant-making. (For the record, I am not "gone" from the foundation, as Hill claims. I have had a continuing consulting contract with it since 1999, and my current title is "senior fellow." I work with grantees and coach Gates program officers on strategies for strengthening instructional leadership.)

But I wonder what Hill means by "Progressive." I am troubled by the tendency in education to oversimplify problems and pigeonhole people. For myself, I have indeed been influenced by the work of Ted Sizer and Deborah Meier; they and their associates have done some of the most important education R & D of the past quarter century. However, I have advocated "conservative" ideas, such as a national literacy/citizenship assessment and new approaches to strengthening school and district accountability. And the "populist" side of me has urged educators, parents, and business and community leaders to work together to rethink what students need to know in the 21st century and to "reinvent" schools, teaching, and curriculum in order to motivate all students to want to achieve success.

TONY WAGNER
Codirector of the
Change Leadership Group
Harvard Graduate School
of Education



feature

Bill and Melinda Gates shift from computers in libraries to reform in high schools

BY PAUL T. HILL

The biggest philanthropy in the world sits in an unmarked building next to an industrial dry dock. It does little to attract attention, but everyone knows it's there. And even though its official address is a post office box, everyone involved in education reform knows that this particular mail slot means a half-billion dollars a year to help fix our public schools.

This is the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, P.O. Box 23350, Seattle, Washington, a philanthropy created by the Microsoft founder and his wife in 2000 and now employing more than two hundred people and worth almost $30 billion, more than a billion of which it gives away each year. The foundation has already invested nearly a billion dollars in an effort to redesign the American high school. It supports some 1,500 existing schools; 450 of them are either restructured or brand new. Chicago is opening 100 new schools with the help of Gates Foundation money; New York City, 200. Gates is putting money into high-school redesign in Oakland, Milwaukee, Cleveland, and Boston.

Not all of the Gates Foundation money goes to education: thirty-five percent is earmarked for global health initiatives, and a sizable amount stays with social-welfare and civic-improvement programs in the Pacific Northwest. However, enough of it is spent trying to improve the nation's public schools (see Figure 1) that it is worth asking if Bill Gates, a college dropout, knows what he's doing. In fact, when the world's richest man started his philanthropic work, in the mid-1990s, he was handing out computers to public libraries, which seemed a perfectly reasonable endeavor for a former computer geek who runs the world's largest software company.

How did the young mogul (Gates just turned 50) come to the conclusion, as he told the nation's governors at an Education Summit in Washington, D.C. in 2005, that "America's high schools are obsolete"? More important, how did Gates and his giving, through various philanthropic proxies, evolve from rewiring libraries to reinventing the American high school?

One view is that the technology wizard-turned-businessman is simply applying to philanthropy his genius for finding empty market niches. That strategy is easy to understand in international health, buying malaria and AIDS vaccines for destitute African communities and creating new delivery systems for getting them delivered. But if there are miracle education drugs, they haven't emerged yet. And the education delivery systems, though they exist, don't work very well, especially with bold new initiatives, which is what the Gates Foundation is attempting in education.

L'État ce n'est pas Moi!

First, a word from the critics, as a way, perhaps, of explaining what's at stake here and what Gates Foundation money has come to represent in the education-reform business. This particular branch of criticism is worried primarily that Gates is spending his money in the wrong places (see Table 1). The problems of elementary school, for instance, still aren't solved, they say. Promoting small schools, they grumble, is a goal too narrowly focused on raising test scores and too insensitive to the communitarian roots of the preexisting small-schools movement.

Though there are always legitimate grounds for disagreement about priorities, Gates Foundation defenders, me among them, see these criticisms as derived from misplaced expectations. A foundation can create one ingrate and ten disappointed suitors by making just one grant. (It's only right that I should admit to being, at different times, both a happy grantee and a disgruntled rejectee.)

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Race Talk

I appreciate Nathan Glazer's taking the time to review my book, *Colormute: Race Talk Dilemmas in an American School* (*book review*, Winter 2006). However, he neglected the core point of the book: that "race talk dilemmas" plague American educators on a daily basis. Deep dilemmas regarding when and how to talk and *not* talk racially about people, practices, programs, policies, and patterns also plague researchers who care about accurate analyses and the effects of such public discourse (or lack of it) on children. Race-talk dilemmas are a key aspect of American education; they are the phenomenon that *Colormute* is all about.

Both clumsy race talk and actively not talking about race (I call the latter colormuteness) can make things worse.

Glazer seems frustrated that I keep these dilemmas in mind through 300 pages. "She seems to want the teachers to recognize and be more straightforward in their talk about racial realities," he writes; "but she does not want them to acknowledge straightforwardly that blacks, Latinos, and Samoans are the problem." Yet in education, *both* clumsy race talk *and* actively not talking about race (I call the latter *colormuteness*) can make things worse. This is the reality of American education: we are a nation plagued by racial inequality, by attempts to ignore racial disparities, and by clumsy and reductive attempts to discuss them. For any educator in any real American school, how to talk about race, and when, is an ongoing question of practice and policy.

Colormute attempts to assist educators not only by outlining some tactics for skillful race talk, but also by laying out core dilemmas of race talk and colormuteness for educators themselves to consider. By analyzing their own race talk and colormuteness, educators, as intelligent adults, can make decisions about when and how it helps to talk about race and when and how it harms.

MICA POLLOCK
Assistant Professor
Harvard Graduate School
of Education

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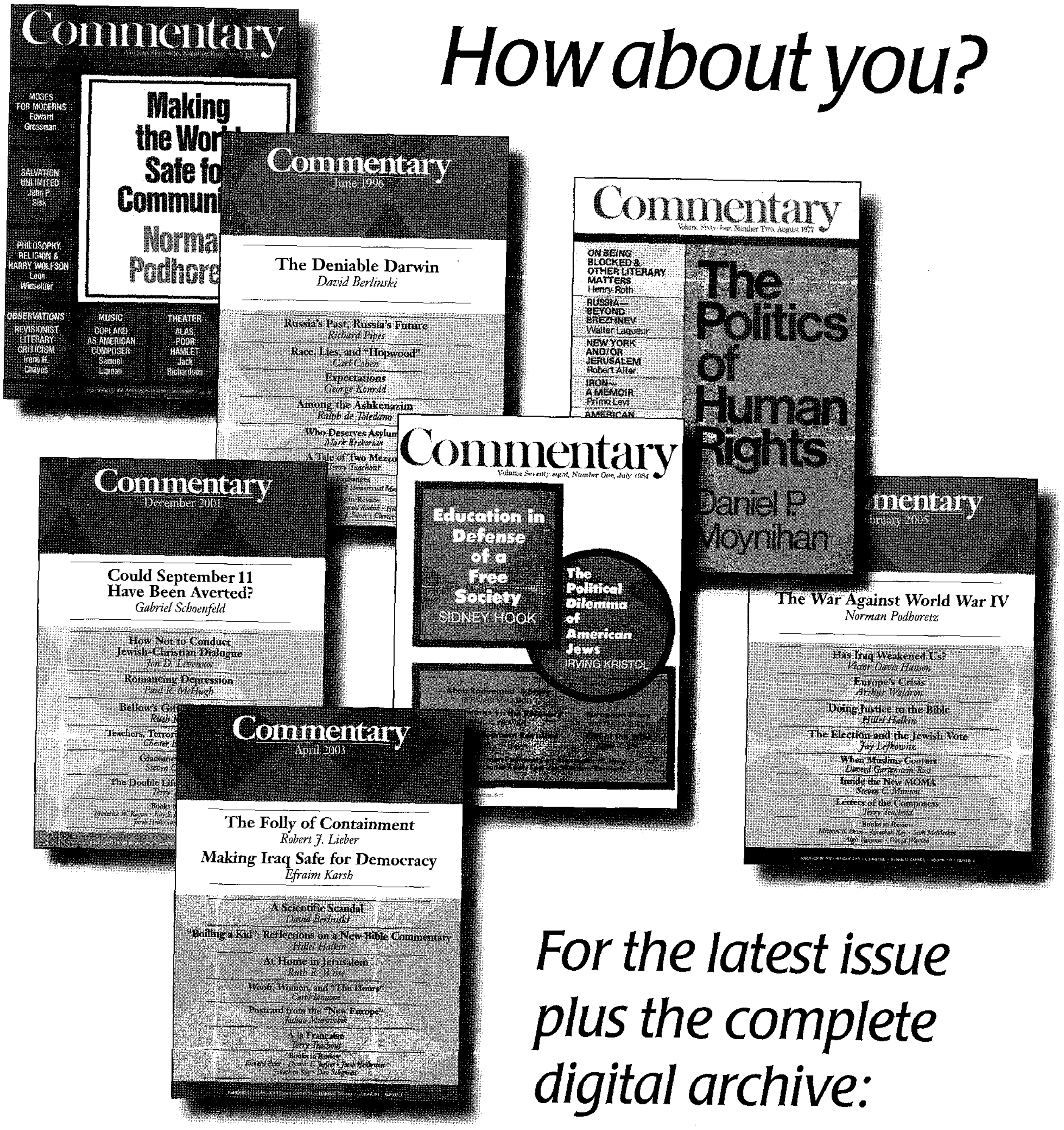

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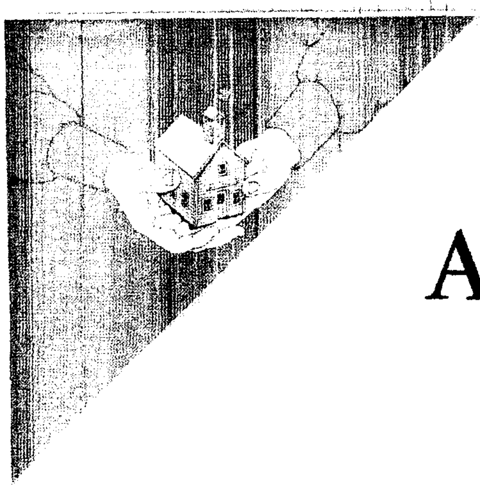

the legal beat

A Setback in Dover

Last rites for Intelligent Design

BY JOSH DUNN AND MARTHA DERTHICK

Will Judge John Jones's blunt, much-publicized, year-end opinion in *Kitzmiller v. Dover*, a Pennsylvania case on Intelligent Design (ID), be the end of lawsuits over ID or the beginning of a wave?

Kitzmiller was launched after the school board in Dover, a town outside Harrisburg with just 3,600 students, voted to require the district's 9th-grade biology teachers to read to their students a four-paragraph statement advising them that evolution is a theory, "not a fact." The board told teachers to refer students to *Of Pandas and People*, a text favored by many creationists that defines ID as the belief "that various forms of life began abruptly through an intelligent agency, with their distinctive features already intact—fish with fins and scales, birds with feathers, beaks, and wings, etc." A more usual definition holds merely that ID finds some organic matter to be of "irreducible complexity" and thus not explicable as a product of evolution.

Polls show that an overwhelming majority of Americans believe in a providential being and are skeptical about evolution.

Eleven local parents (one named Kitzmiller) sued, with help from the American Civil Liberties Union, Americans United for Separation of Church and State, and an elite Philadelphia law firm, Pepper Hamilton. The suit claimed that the board's action violated the First Amendment ban on establishment of religion.

The defendants were badly beaten on every front. In November, soon after the six-week, non-jury trial ended, the Dover electorate voted eight of the school board's nine members out of office. The following month they were beaten again by Judge Jones, whose 139-page opinion called the board's ID decision religiously motivated and accused it of "breathtaking inanity." Jones said that ID was not science. He also ordered that the school district pay the plaintiffs' legal costs. Pepper Hamilton hinted that it might send bills to individual board members who voted for the ID statement.

The defeats, along with the turmoil caused by hordes of reporters from far-flung places, are likely to make other local boards hesitate before raising even timid questions about evolution. At the least, a prudent board might want to have the backing of the Discovery Institute, a Seattle-based nonprofit and a principal proponent of ID, which had distanced itself from the Dover defense, perhaps anticipating the loss. The defendants were instead represented by Richard Thompson of the Thomas More Law Center of Ann Arbor, Michigan, which is dedicated to protecting the religious freedoms of Christians.

Earlier in the year a Cobb County, Georgia, school board was similarly rebuffed by a federal district judge. The Georgia board had ordered that a sticker be attached to biology textbooks stating, "This textbook contains material on evolution. Evolution is a theory, not a fact, regarding the origin of living things. This material should be approached with an open mind, studied carefully, and critically considered." The judge in that case ruled that the statement was an unconstitutional endorsement of religion because it was supported by religious opponents of evolution. Unlike Dover, however, the Cobb County board survived to file an appeal, which was being heard by the 11th Circuit as Jones handed down his opinion.

Will there be fresh lawsuits in the wake of *Kitzmiller*? The victors appear ready to turn to state school boards, where proponents of ID have made the most headway. State boards in Kansas and Ohio, among others, have adopted science standards that call for critical analysis of evolution. The day after Jones ruled, the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* reported that Americans United had obtained boxes of records from the Ohio Department of Education and was threatening a lawsuit. "We hope Ohio takes notice and cleans house," said an official of Americans United.

There remains the question of what the litigation, no matter the outcome or opinions, means for science education, and beyond that whether science education has much effect on what Americans believe. Polls show that an overwhelming majority of Americans believe in a providential being and are skeptical about evolution. Critics of evolution seem to be fighting a battle that they have already won.

Josh Dunn is assistant professor of political science, the University of Colorado–Colorado Springs.
Martha Derthick is professor emeritus of American government, the University of Virginia.

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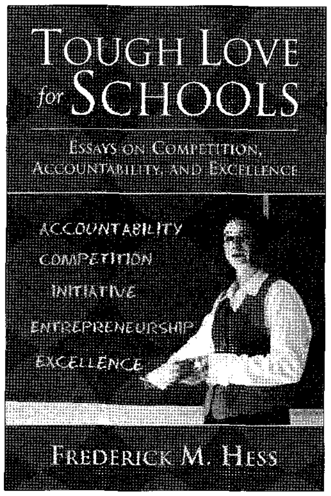
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TOUGH LOVE *for* SCHOOLS

FREDERICK M. HESS

In the world of K–12 education, it's hard to find anyone who will forthrightly declare that teachers are no more saintly than anyone else, that poor schools should be closed and lousy teachers should be fired, that philanthropy may sometimes do more harm than good, that teaching experience is not essential to being a school principal, that schools should be more efficient and cost-effective, or that profit-driven competition might be good for public education. These are the kinds of "radical" ideas that Frederick Hess puts forth in this book of essays on school reform.

FREDERICK M. HESS is director of educational policy studies at the American Enterprise Institute and executive editor of *Education Next*.

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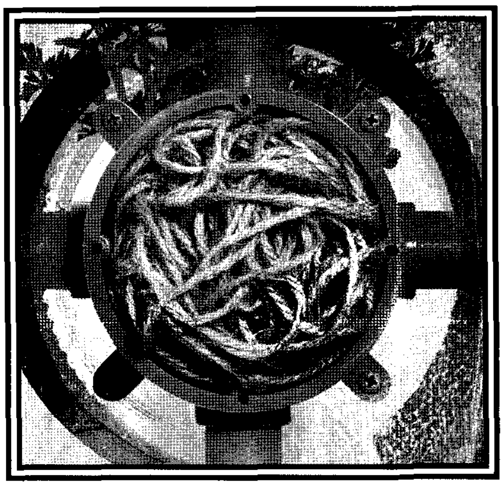
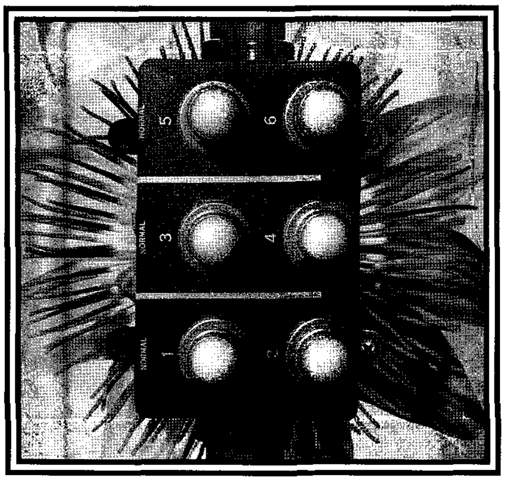
Our Schools in the Year 2030



The past few years have seen a whirlwind of developments in school reform. Dramatic efforts to upend the 20th-century model of local schooling—among them, increased accountability and charter schooling—have made considerable advances. What if we look a little further out? To the near future, a place we can almost touch. What will it take to create schools that are efficient, effective, and equal to the challenges of the 21st century? In this forum, two veteran observers—one a savvy entrepreneur, the other a leading scholar—take a look at the world of schooling circa 2030, sharing two widely different perspectives on what education is likely to look like and what that means for school reform today.

How Will They Be Different?



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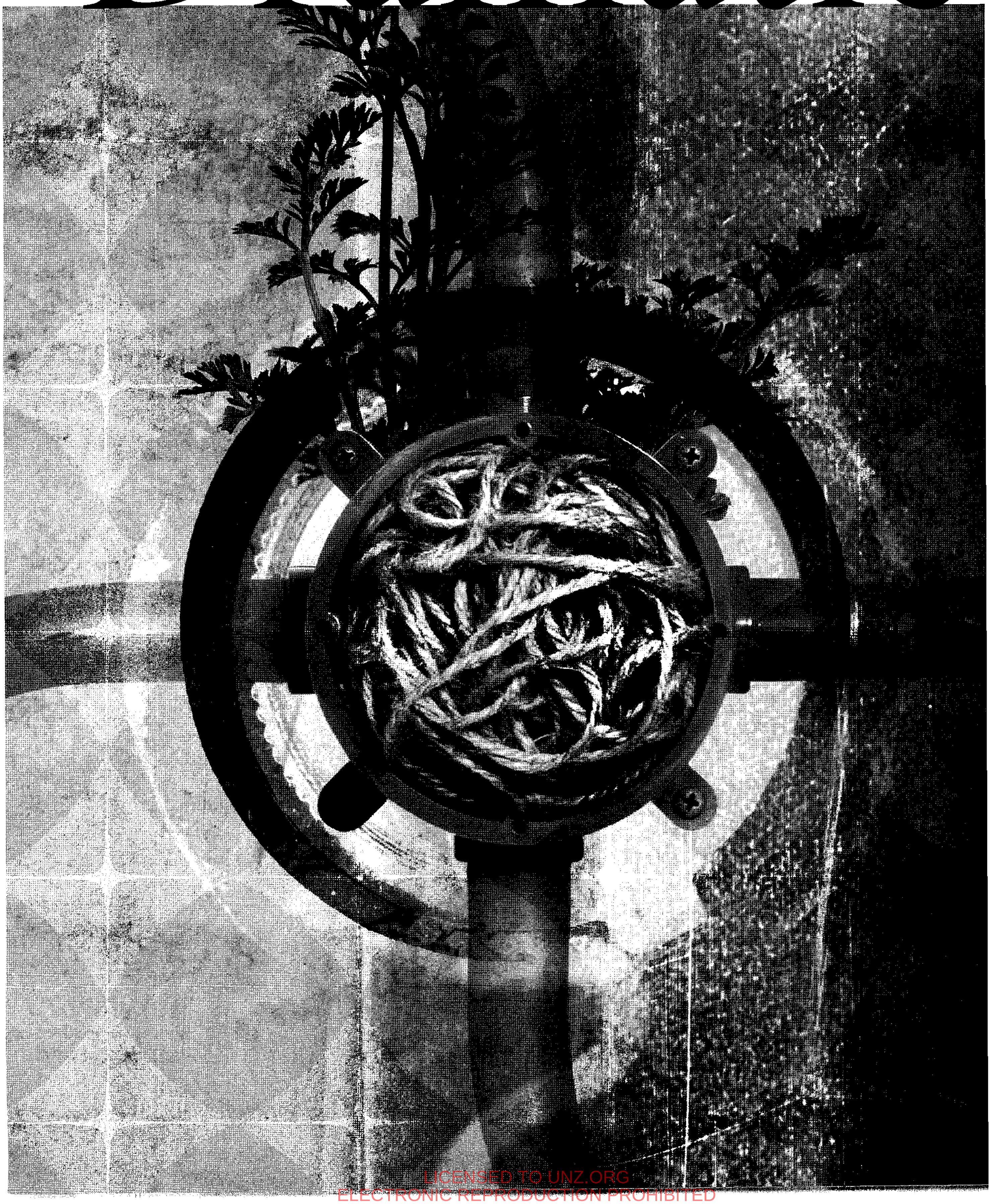


forum

Growth Is Possible

Untangling education's Gordian knot

BY CHRIS WHITTLE

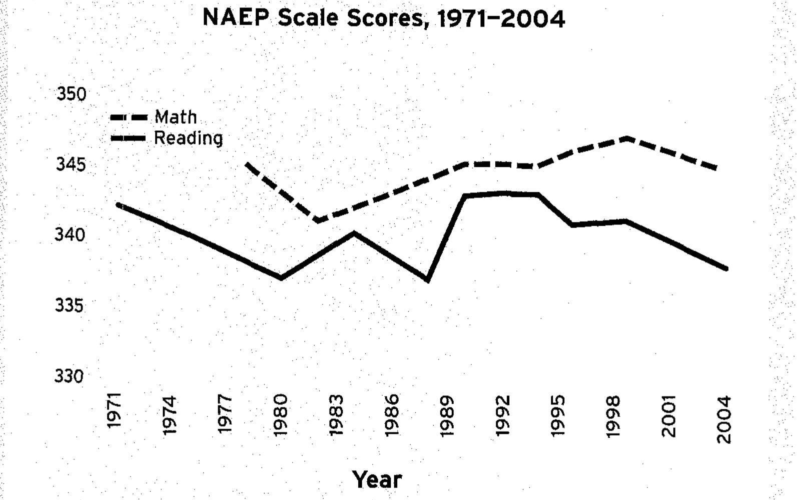
Until Thomas Friedman recently discovered otherwise, we believed the world was round. We also thought that phone calls had to travel through Ma Bell wires, and that your operator would be in Des Moines, not in New Delhi. Remember when we had just three daily television news programs, one with father Walter, and all at precisely the time when only our grandmothers could watch? And are you bothered that now anyone can see what's on your rooftop or in your driveway, anytime, via Google Earth? Does all this change, turmoil, even progress, concern you? Is your world being rocked?

Don't worry; if you need a fetal-like retreat to times gone by, there is a place you can find respite: *your childhood school is still here.* Even if the old buildings are gone, your old daily routine within them has been superbly, if unconsciously, preserved to a degree that would make King Tut beam brighter than the gold in his tomb. And not only can *you* return to your school-day experience just by visiting your children's schools; at the rate change is occurring in education, your great-grandchildren will attend the same ones!

The point is simple: how we educate our children today is remarkably similar to how we educated them decades ago. Perhaps more than any other modern-day institution, schooling is nearly impervious to change. If our "old school design" was working with a high degree of consistency and reliability, such inflexibility might be fine. But decades of facts say that it isn't fine. Results from the most recent National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) show that roughly 15 million American children—more children than reside in all

Even at the Top, Little Has Changed (Figure 1)

The average National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) score of those 17-year-olds who score in the highest decile has dropped 4 points in reading since 1971 and the math score is at the same level as in 1978.



NAEP Scale Scores, 1971–2004

SOURCE: NAEP Long-Term Trend Assessment

of England—are achieving below basic levels of literacy and numeracy. If the scale of this number concerns you, you should find it even more troubling that it has been that way for decades. And our problems don't stop with the children most in need. Even our best students are falling behind, in international comparisons and at home. Among the "talented tenth," those in the top 10 percent of NAEP test-takers, reading scores have dropped four points since 1971, and math scores have not budged since they were first measured in 1978 (see Figure 1).

Simply put, we are not making the grade *at the bottom or the top.*

Why Things Stay the Same

Why does America seem so unresponsive? Let me suggest three reasons.

First, because "numb" is the root word of numbers. We have lost our outrage (if indeed we ever had it) about the deplorable statistics noted above. Education inadequacy is not sexy. Illiteracy is not sudden in its cause nor quick with its solution and thus lacks the "production values" highly desired by our ratings-craved media. Illiteracy can't compete with Katrina, 9/11, Iraq, or even a good Supreme Court nomination fight. Sure, there's the obligatory annual story in most news vehicles about "our education crisis," but contrast that to, say, round-the-clock, multiple-week coverage of a devastating hurricane. Our sound bite–oriented media find it far too complex to connect what is going on in our schools with the possibility of a 21st-century, full-eclipse of the American economy, imported from the Pacific Rim. Let C-SPAN or PBS do that kind of dull coverage.

A second reason is the colossal, $400 billion per year status quo that makes the military-industrial complex look nimble by comparison.

The third reason for our inaction is even more important: *America does not believe there is a "next" generation of schools.* What, we think, could be *that* different in schools of the future? We might change the calendar around, pay teachers a little more, update the curriculum, but none of those things is that big a deal. After all, schools are schools are schools.

A Failure of Imagination

I've now been involved in the world of public education for 15 years, as the founder and CEO of Edison Schools, one of the country's first private companies to take on the challenge of improving public schools. If Edison, which now works in various ways in nearly 1,000 schools and serves more than 300,000 students, were a public school district, I would be one of the longest-serving heads of a major school system in the United States (average tenure for the superintendent of a major system is less than four years). I've seen and heard a lot. And one of the things I've seen is stunningly uncharacteristic of America, earth's creative capital. We've had a national failure of imagination when it comes to what our schools can and should be. We don't *believe* there is anything particularly new to discover in schooling, so, as a society, we don't set out to find it. Columbus believed. NASA believed. When it comes to schools, we don't. For sure, there are pioneers here and there, but our national mindset does not embrace the possibility that our schools could be and should be radically different.

Instead, because "the way school is" was imprinted on all of us with Intel-like precision by our own 12 years of schooling, America believes that schools are governed by a set of immutable, almost physical, laws, which include:

1. In schools, adults must supervise children virtually all of the time (Dickens would feel right at home).
2. The school day must be rigidly organized, generally chopped up into 45-minute or one-hour blocks (changing this to longer periods of time was, some years back, viewed as a grand breakthrough).
3. The smaller the number of children in a class, the better the education results (never mind if a smaller class might mean a teacher who is paid less and is less prepared).

4. Adults must run all aspects of the school—and do all the work within it (that many teenagers now work after school and on weekends is a fact to ignore).
5. There are no efficiencies, economies, or new qualities to be found in "design breakthroughs"; greater spending is the only way to improve education (disregard more or less flat education results after two decades of real-dollar annual spending increases).

What if *all* of the above "truths" are incorrect—truths that we will some day regard as myths, artifacts of a forgotten era? What if we approached the organization of a school *without* any of these "truths" as cornerstones? Where might simple logic and our own real-life experiences take us?

Let me suggest what some of the new truths of school design might be:

1. Learning accomplished through individual effort, or through working in small teams, is as "sticky" (well retained) as that served up in a classroom group, no matter what its size.
2. Learning can come in many forms, and the size of the learning group can vary greatly without any penalization of effect.
3. Children are capable of tremendous focus and responsibility, and they can be taught these traits at a much younger age than many people might think.
4. Variety matters in learning; too much of any one thing, like sitting passively in a classroom for 12 years, has rapidly diminishing returns; and lack of variety negatively affects teachers as much as children.
5. Students can teach as well as learn. Has your child ever taught you anything? Has one of your older children ever taught something to one of your younger ones?

The Future

Working from these potential new "truths," let's imagine what a school of the future might look like. In fact, in key respects, the best school of the future might share some aspects of the school of the past, the 19th-century past that existed in many places of America up to the 1920s: the schoolhouse where older students were instructors, teaching under the guidance of a highly qualified adult. Indeed, we can reconstruct a school of the past that is appropriate to the modern era, where teachers' salaries are competitive with other professions, where students are taught by older peers under the supervision of master teachers who can use technology for pedagogical purposes.

Suppose, for example, that beginning in the 1st grade children spent an hour a day learning on their own, not under the direct supervision of a teacher (although perhaps watched over by an older peer). Let's presume that by the 3rd grade, the amount of time students were "on their own" increased to two hours per day. By the 6th grade and throughout middle school, let's assume that only half of a student's time was spent in what we now think of as a classroom. Finally, imagine that by high school only one-third of a student's time was in a traditional classroom setting. If this sounds overly radical, consider that many college students are in class fewer than 15 hours a week, half the time of a high-school senior. College freshmen are only 90 days older than high-school seniors. Did something magical occur in that short period to make them more capable of independent learning? Remember that fully half of all high-school seniors enter college.

If students are not in a classroom, where are they? Sleeping at their desks? Playing video games on school computers? Well, the answer is that they are learning—just not at that very moment with a teacher, just not in a class, but still "in school." More often than not, they will be reading! Educators believe deeply that students should read, but there is very little time in the school day for that to happen. And after a long day at school and with other homework and important activities, how much time is realistically available in the evening? They also will be working with a small group of other students. And they might be on their computers, writing, researching, exploring, mining that almost endless, great new ethereal library—the Internet. All the while, they will be monitored by their somewhat older peers, just as

Children are capable of tremendous focus and responsibility, and they can be taught these traits at a much younger age than many people might think.

On the Henry Levin Commentary

Editors' note: Since Henry Levin considered, in some detail, the record of Edison Schools in his essay on the future, Chris Whittle responds here to Levin's essay.

Henry Levin's essay criticizes the involvement of the private sector in public education, Edison Schools, and my vision of public education's future. These responses to selected points are intended to provoke thought on the overall thrust of his argument.

Economies of Scale. Superintendents struggling with the *loss of scale* resulting from enrollment declines would strongly disagree with Levin's contention that there are few economies of scale in education. Economies of scale occur at the *system* level–not the school level. As in well-run, large, public-school systems, Edison's central costs have improved significantly, in percentages, over time, which is a key reason Edison is now profitable.

Academic Results. Levin calls Edison's academic results "mediocre" and cites a recent RAND report and his view of results in Baltimore and Philadelphia. Readers can draw their own conclusions with data in hand, but this much we know: In the fall of 2002, Edison was assigned to manage 20 schools in Philadelphia with an average proficiency of only 6 percent. Proficiency has nearly *quadrupled* in 36 months. These schools–among the district's most challenging–have kept pace with a district achieving the highest gains among America's major urban systems. Edison was recently asked to manage two additional schools in Philadelphia.

Since the fall of 2000, Edison has managed three schools in Baltimore. The average ranking of those schools in 2000 was 101 out of 117 district schools. Today, their average ranking is *57 out of 115 schools*, with one school going from 107th to 24th. Our contract there was recently extended.

The RAND report says, "From 2002 to 2004, average proficiency rates in currently operating Edison schools increased by 11 percentage points in reading and 17 percentage points in math. Meanwhile, average proficiency rates in a matched set of comparison schools increased by lesser amounts, 9 percentage points in reading and 13 percentage points in math (although the Edison advantage is statistically significant only in math)."

Greater Funding. Levin incorrectly says that Edison receives more funding than typical public schools. Edison on average receives resources *below* those of public schools in the cities where it works. Exceptions are rare. An excellent report from the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation Institute shows charter-school funding well below comparable public school funding.

The Model. Levin uses a 40-year-old study to support his view that our current education model cannot be changed. However, a miraculous technological leap occurred on the way to the 21st century: the invention of the Internet and the PC. Levin correctly states that early uses of such technologies in classrooms have not worked well, but Wright's first flight did not go very far either.

Hope vs. Pessimism. Mr. Levin foresees the "struggle of incremental reforms in a system designed to conserve rather than transform society." While America's public educators want to conserve democracy and freedom, they do *not* want an education design that dooms 15 million children to near illiteracy. We *can* change this outcome by transforming a model that may have once served us well but is now out of date.

— Chris Whittle

graduate students supervise and aid undergraduates in college environments. Though they will not be in class half of their day, they will be in a school building all of it.

Many educators reading this are probably saying, perhaps in less kindly terms, "This idea is hopelessly naive. Students cannot be entrusted with their own education; they cannot be expected to manage their own time. Students don't understand the importance of education and, therefore, can't be expected to manage it."

My response: schools have failed to make students the masters of their own learning, and we have the results to show for it. We are still operating in an 18th-century mindset, believing that these young, half-civilized things called children must be literally whipped into shape, if not with a stick then with a never-ending schedule. If students don't understand the importance of education enough to take charge of their own, it is because the schools we have designed don't spend any real time helping them understand this.

A huge side benefit of this "independent learning" model—and I am talking here mainly about middle- and high-school programs—is that it would *double* teachers' compensation in the United States. If students spent half as much time in class, then half as many teachers would be needed. And we could pay those remaining twice as much—without increasing taxes by one cent.

I introduce the concept of large-scale, independent learning in America's middle- and high-school communities and the corresponding increase in teachers' pay to suggest that there may be a more powerful school design "out there" that is radically different from what we now know. My example is only one idea of what education might be like. There are many more concepts worthy of serious consideration and development. However, most of these will never achieve meaningful scale unless America takes a fundamentally different approach to how it brings about change in its schools.

Focus on Education

This year, the federal government will spend $27 billion on healthcare research and development (R&D) through the National Institutes of Health. The Department of Defense recently invested $9 billion just on the prototype of the next generation of fighter planes. These investments are precisely why we have one of the finest health-care systems on the globe (providing our citizens one of the longest life spans of any country) and an unparalleled military. We have exceptional health care and national security because we constantly *invest in change*—above and beyond what we spend to merely operate our military and health-care systems. Our health care and national security may not be perfect, but there is little question about our international placement in these fields.

By contrast, we invest virtually nothing in changing our schools. Education research-and-development spending at the federal government level is 1/100th of what we spend in health care. Why, then, are we surprised when our K–12 schools are far from the envy of the world? We spend a staggering sum, $400 billion a year, to run the schools we inherited from one hundred years ago. At the same time, we are investing, by modern R&D standards, only a pittance ($260 million) to design and test the next generation of schools. As a result, we get exactly what we pay for—out-of-date school designs.

Our local school districts don't have the scale to take on these R&D initiatives. The private sector of K–12 education, which is still in a fledgling stage, does not have the resources, either. And if you expect philanthropy to come to the rescue, think again. The endowment of just one Ivy League college is more than ten times all the annual giving to our public schools. Only one institution in America has the scale required to fund the invention of our next generation of public schools: our federal government. If 15,000,000 less-than-literate students are not enough to move it to action, let's hope, for the sake of our children, that the looming threat of second-class economic citizenry in the 21st century does the trick

Chris Whittle is founder and CEO of Edison Schools and author of Crash Course: Imagining a Better Future for Public Education.

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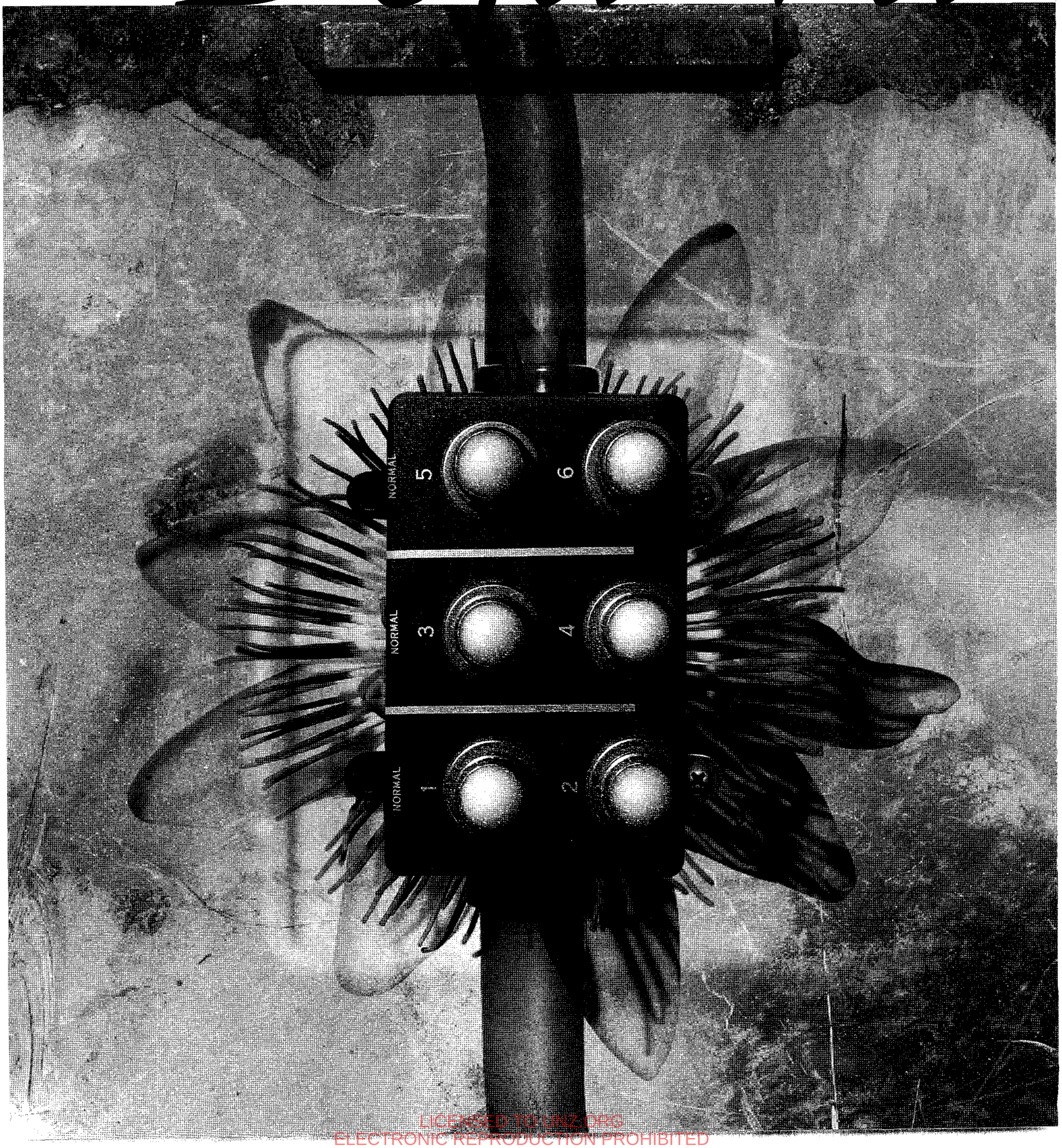
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All Over Again?

Schools will operate in the future as they do now

BY HENRY LEVIN

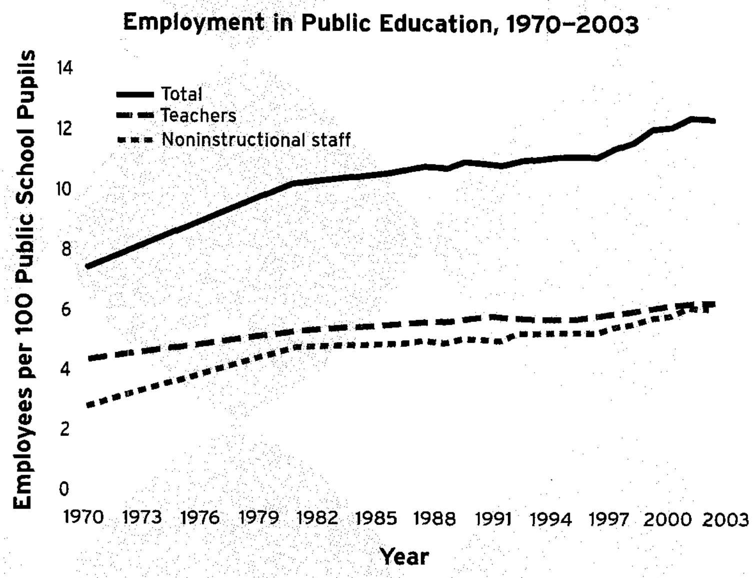
My vision of where education will be—and where it must be—overlaps with Chris Whittle's to some extent. But it also differs in significant ways. Whittle's essay, drawn from his cheerful book (*Crash Course*), tells us that most of our education troubles will be over in just a quarter century. I disagree. His assumptions often differ markedly from the available evidence on what works and ignore the complexity of the witches' brew of politics, unions, bureaucracies, immigration, economics, and the social sciences. He implies that his vision is inexorable when it is merely wishful.

Chris Whittle's projection for 2030 is an elaborated echo of the 1990s, when for-profit education-management organizations (EMOs) proposed a mission and rationale for transforming American education. The standard fare promoted by those EMOs and their venture-capital sources was that the education industry was the next big opportunity for private capital, following the profitable example of the earlier HMO transformation of health care.

The lead financial actor at the beginning of that EMO era was Merrill Lynch, advisor to Whittle's company, Edison Schools. Merrill Lynch published *The Book of Knowledge*, a 193-page report on the $740 billion education and training market. Distributed widely to potential investors, *The Book* identified five "Big Ideas" that would transform the education and training industry over the next decade. But the book's story begins with the ostensible failure of public education and its rapidly rising costs, mediocre student achievement results, poor high-school graduation

The Labor of Public Education (Figure 1)

Despite a rush of technological advances over the past 35 years, the number of public school employees per pupil has grown by more than 50 percent.



Note: Noninstructional staff comprises all school and district employees who are not teachers.

SOURCE: National Center for Education Statistics

rates, and limp international rankings. The reason given for this miserable showing was the inefficiency of government.

Business enterprise efficiency would rescue the schools through organizational improvements; selection, training, assessing, and rewarding of principals and teachers on the basis of performance; and adoption of promising education technologies. Sophisticated business projections were conjured to assure potential investors that these enterprises would be highly profitable (doing well) while serving society (doing good).

The Wrong Assumptions

Not all has gone well, and Edison is a good case study, having lost more than six hundred million dollars of its investors' funding. Edison has one of the most complete models among the EMOs. It has truly attempted to deliver a quality school, but the evidence on raising student achievement shows no revolution in results. According to a recent evaluation by the RAND Corporation and comparisons in Philadelphia and Baltimore, Edison's record is not very different from that of similar public schools, though it has received greater funding than its public counterparts.

Somehow, in projecting to the future, Whittle posits a large number of changes in the basic institutions for delivering education, education research, and education personnel, based on the "success" of the EMOs, especially Edison. And despite the financial losses and mediocre achievement results, he believes that schools should be turned over to large businesses—with "economies of scale." Teachers' salaries would be double those of today to obtain the best professional talent; new training institutions for principals would arise through collaborative efforts of top business and education schools to churn out exemplary leadership; and government would increase funding for education research by a factor of ten or more.

The Whittle scenario also assumes that school districts would retain only a tiny percentage of federal, state, and local revenues, perhaps 1 percent, and limit themselves to "monitoring and quality-control" oversight of schools; private contractors would receive the other 99 percent. National and international education firms will compete for these contracts, and their retention by the district will depend on their performance. Teachers will be chosen by contracted schools, but will be employees of both districts and contractors (opening up districts to liability for personnel whom they neither select nor supervise). Teachers' salaries will reach numbers like $130,000 (adjusted for inflation) at the highest ranks. Principals will earn up to $250,000 with a base of 60 percent of this amount and the remainder in bonuses.

Back to the Future

The complete shift of schools to for-profit contractors seems to be based on the old business claims of the 1990s and Whittle's selective interpretation of Edison's record. It is also based on the argument that the contracting firms will benefit from economies of scale that are unavailable to the average school district in the United States. This is a strange and stubborn argument for Edison, which persistently claimed that annual losses in the tens of millions of dollars were due to insufficient numbers of schools. Subsequent expansions led only to larger losses.

Research has shown that beyond very small schools and school districts, there are few opportunities for economies of scale in education because most of the costs increase with enrollments and are not fixed costs that decline with additional clients. In fact, the number of teachers and other employees per student has increased in recent decades (see Figure 1). Further, size tends to depersonalize education. As a consequence, the leading edge of school reform is the promotion of smaller rather than larger units.

Whittle supports his assertion on scale economies with a table (page 180 in his book) that contrives the appearance of economies of scale by comparing a school district spending $28 million in 2030 with a hypothetical contractor receiving $25 billion in revenues. The table purports to show where contractors would experience scale economies and how they would yield a profit of 10 percent of revenues. As Yogi Berra would say, It's *déjà vu* all over again. It hasn't worked in the past; there's no reason to believe it will work in 2030.

Even more puzzling is how schools would prosper with half the teaching personnel. According to Whittle, this would be done largely through replacing teachers with student labor. Educators have long argued for greater participation of students in the education process, but not as a way of reducing costs. Four decades ago, noted economist William Baumol argued that the idea of reducing costs in education and similar labor-intensive industries by substituting capital for labor or less-skilled labor for higher-paid professionals was impractical, at best. According to Baumol, education, by its very nature and its intransigence to change (whether public or private), is a teacher-intensive activity and so cannot benefit from standard approaches to increasing productivity. Equally, it is not possible to eliminate half of the opera singers in a classical opera or to replace two members of a string quartet with music synthesizers as a cost-effective way of improving quality. To this point no one has succeeded in disproving Baumol's thesis, nor has anyone discovered methods of providing the same education with half the number of teachers.

We cannot count on technology. Of course, even as astute an observer as Bertrand Russell got this wrong in predicting in 1933 that instruction by motion pictures would require only large auditoriums with low-paid classroom monitors.

What Else Won't Work

Whittle's prime example of assigning students to peer tutoring is already used widely in public schools. I don't know a single situation where this method has reduced teachers' responsibilities. It is a form of supplementary instruction for selected students who are far behind other students (particularly for those with learning disabilities), not a substitute for regular teachers. And peer tutoring is not "free." The cost of effective peer tutoring is higher than alternatives, such as computer-assisted instruction or smaller class sizes or longer school days, because of the needs for adult personnel to coordinate, train, and monitor the student tutors. If peer tutoring has the capability of replacing half of our teachers, why wait until 2030?

Whittle suggests that charters and EMOs would do well to establish demonstration schools to show how we can use student chores to reduce the teachers by half. But it is remarkable that at present he can promise a sweeping future based on this phenomenon without dredging up even a single example as a proof of its existence.

Whittle also assumes (in his book) that the "wireless revolution" will contribute to independent learning and a reduction in the need for teachers. But even if this claim were supported by evidence, the record shows that technology did not reduce teacher cost significantly enough to make Edison profitable or to create superior student achievement. Larry Cuban's history of the overblown promises of education technology (in his 2001 book *Oversold and Underused: Computers in the Classroom*) provides a concrete picture of why we cannot count on technology. Of course, even as astute an observer as Bertrand Russell got this wrong in predicting in 1933 that instruction by motion pictures would require only large auditoriums with low-paid classroom monitors. Whittle is in good company in his zeal for a strategy that has always generated more vision than reality.

In his infomercial on behalf of for-profit education enterprises, there is a technological determinism that assumes no opposition from or conflict with special interests such as teacher unions, administrators, and education bureaucracies. Every projected change is in the interest of all groups, a harmonious solution to what ails the schools. Even teacher organizations that would lose half of their membership and half of their collegial help at the school site will capitulate to the siren song of higher salaries. And new approaches to teacher training will enable them to get better results with half of the labor force and student assistance.

What Can and Should Be Done

Whittle's assertion of the dominant role of for-profit firms in 2030 and the feasibility of halving the teaching force are not demonstrated to be feasible or desirable. Of course, the education system will be pressed to improve, especially on behalf of children from families in poverty, minorities, and immigrants, who will eventually compose a key component of the labor force. We will also need to find ways to ensure that all students master basic skills and that a substantial portion master the thinking skills and collaborative methods that will ensure a productive polity and prosperous economy. It should be noted that there has never been a golden age in education in which these goals were met, and the future will represent a struggle of incremental reforms in a system designed to "conserve" rather than transform society.

What types of reforms?

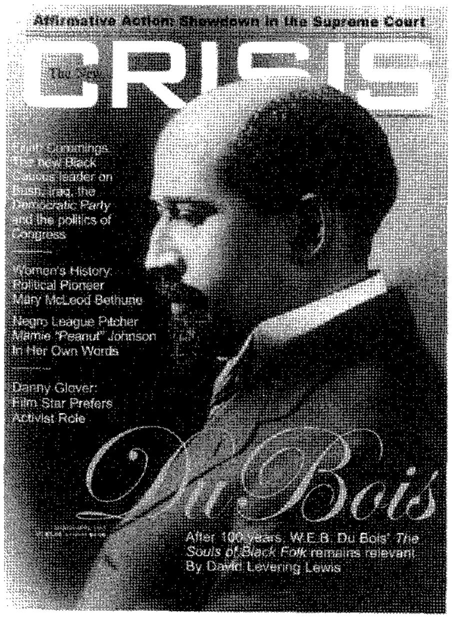
I agree completely with Whittle that we must improve the selection and training of teachers and principals, and increase funding for education research. Raising teachers' salaries is absolutely necessary to get the best talent into teaching. At the same time, the system needs better career ladders for teachers and far more effective approaches to selection, mentoring, and evaluation in order to enlist such talent productively. Teacher turnover, a high-cost item, must be reduced. Almost half of the teachers in Ohio's charter schools quit their schools in the four-year period between 2000 and 2004, in comparison with about 8 percent in conventional public schools and 12 percent in high-poverty, urban public schools, suggesting that new organizations are not a magic formula for school stability. Although technology is unlikely to replace many teachers, it is still a powerful tool for raising education quality by providing a vehicle for topic enrichment, student research, more challenging student projects, and greater student engagement. At the same time, the education community must be open to new forms of enterprise wherever it can make a contribution, such as contracting of specific instructional services, teacher cooperatives, and information technologies that enhance evaluation of students' knowledge and capabilities.

If present evidence is to be used, two potent contributions to raising student achievement will be widespread: effective preschool programs for all children and intensive interventions that build capacities of families to support the education of their children. I believe that both of these will be prevalent by 2030 because they show evidence of great promise even today. If I had my druthers, I would also add that education of at-risk students will shift from remediation and "drill and kill" to enrichment and acceleration, as we have tried to accomplish with the Accelerated Schools Project over the past two decades. The instructional approaches used in the best gifted and talented programs, with their emphasis on engagement, depth, and real-world applications, reinforce both basic skill development and more advanced learning. And the implementation of powerful and widespread approaches to building parents' capacity to support out-of-school learning will gain support from community organizations.

Where will the money come from? By recouping funds that are "lost" to society because of poor education we can easily fund the improvements. Recent work by economists and other academic researchers—some of it presented at a recent symposium at Columbia University ("The Social Costs of Inadequate Education")—concluded that such investments have large payoffs in raising national income and tax revenues and reducing the cost of public services. For example, improvements in the availability and quality of preschool education would save large expenditures on special education and grade retention and improve high-school graduation rates and college attendance, especially among the poor, minorities, and immigrants. Just the loss in state and federal tax revenues from the 23 million high-school dropouts has been estimated at $50 billion a year. High-school dropouts pay about one-half the taxes of high-school graduates, and about one-third the taxes of those with more than a high-school diploma. Public health costs for the estimated 600,000 high-school dropouts in 2004 totaled about $58 billion. Some $10 billion could be saved each year in public assistance through universal high-school graduation; a mere 10 percent increase in the high-school completion rate would shave about $14 billion from the cost of crime. By investing in more productive educational practices, we can recoup magnitudes of investment that can easily fund the improvements set out above. And we don't have to wait until 2030.

The future will represent a struggle of incremental reforms in a system designed to "conserve" rather than transform society.

Henry Levin is professor of economics and education at Teachers College, Columbia University.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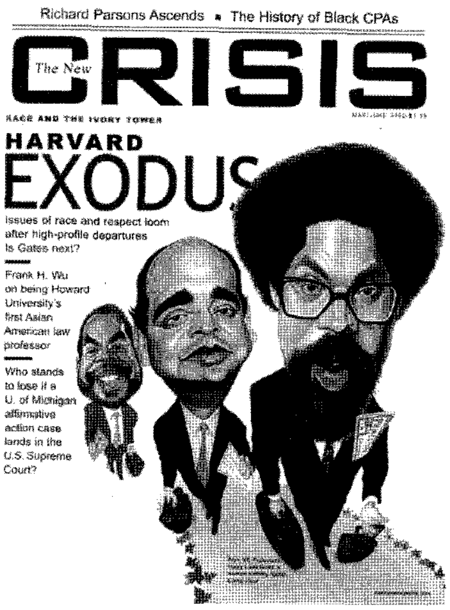
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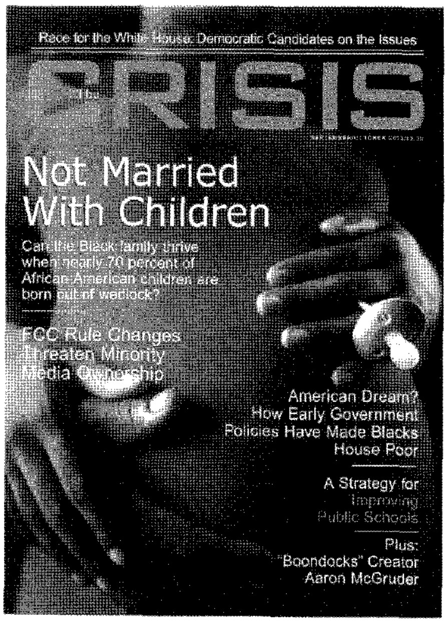
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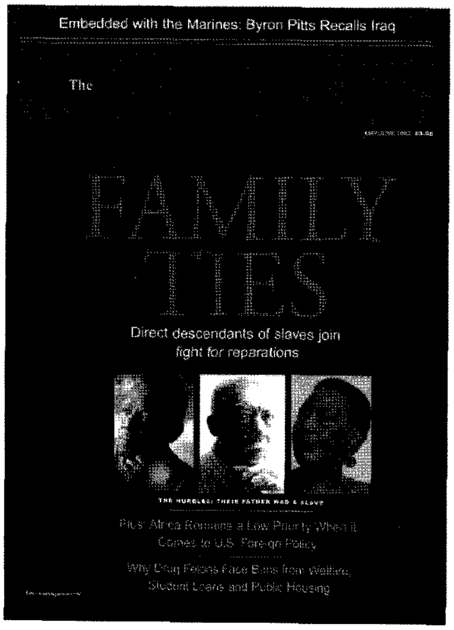
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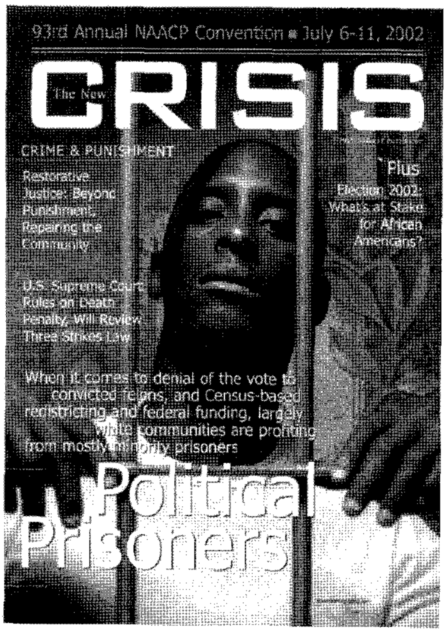
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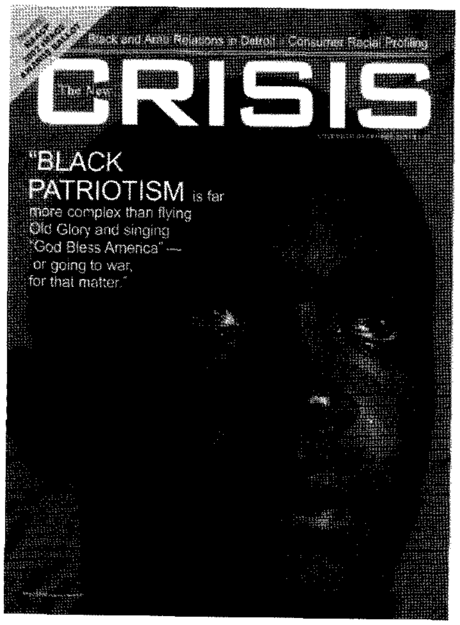
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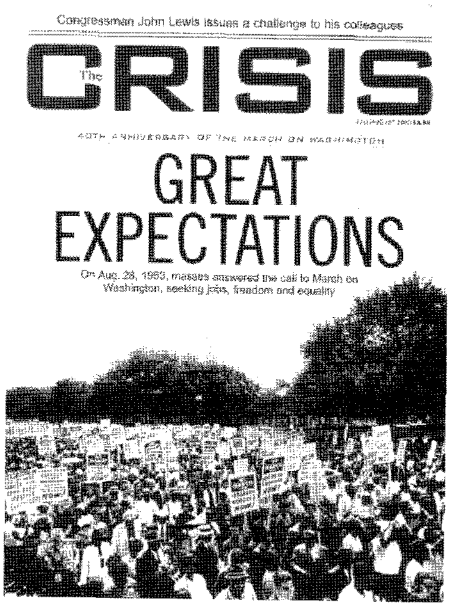
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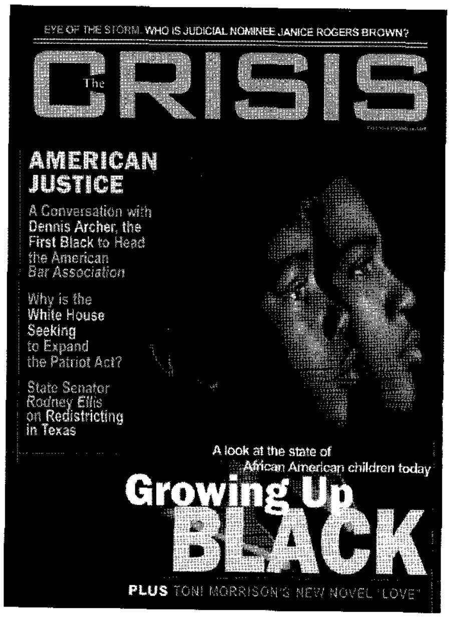
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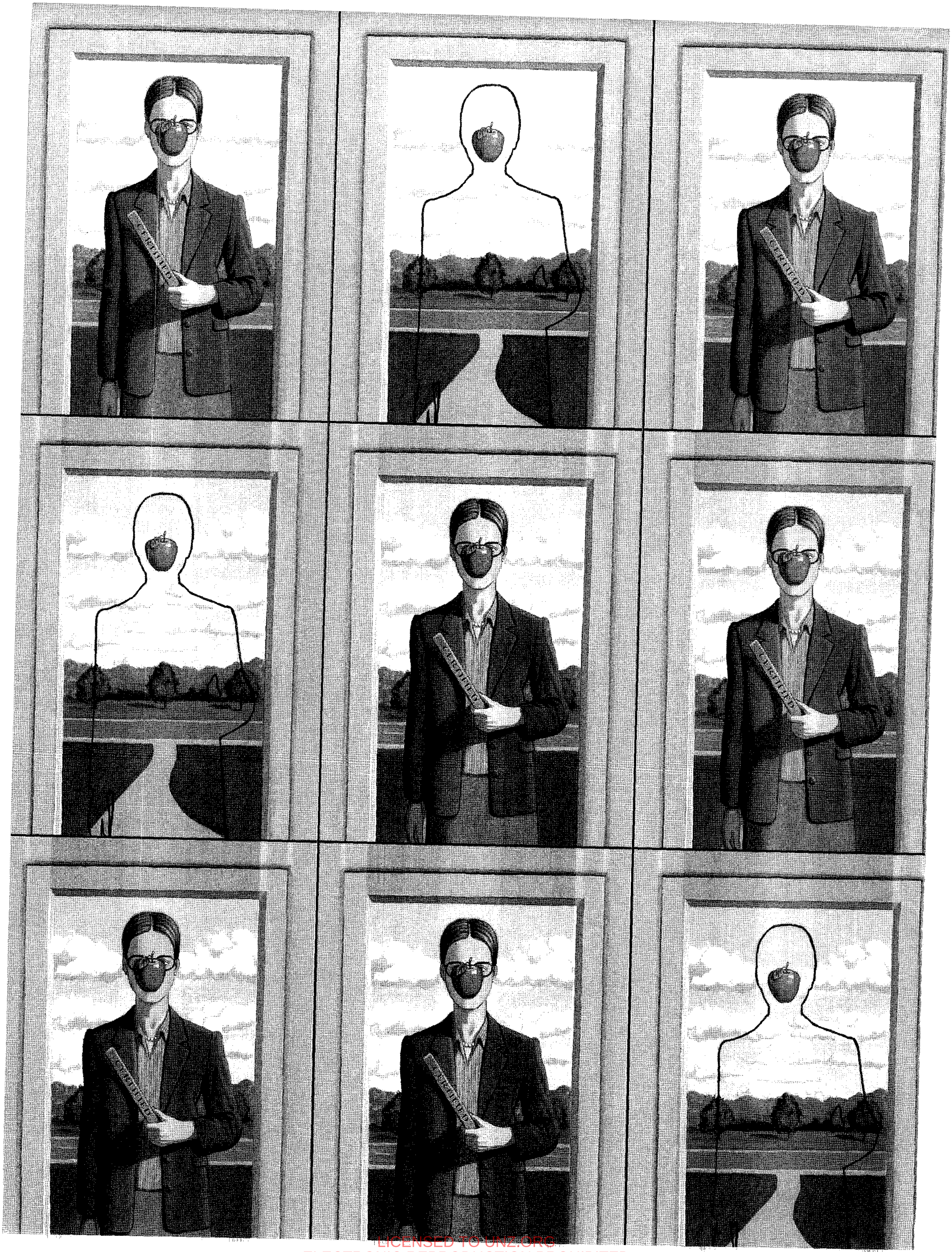

CERTIFIED

Is there a “Qualified Teacher” *shortage?*

BY MICHAEL PODGURSKY

> **Washington**—As American schools reopen, a 15-year effort to “professionalize” the job of teacher is running up against a strong counterforce—the urgent need to fill classroom vacancies.
>
> — *Christian Science Monitor*, August 26, 2002

The headlines in those early years of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) were consistently alarming. “As Standards Rise, Too Few Teachers,” was the one the *Christian Science Monitor* story referred to above. “Federal Education Report Finds Shortage of Qualified Teachers,” noted a headline in the *Washington Times* the following year.

In the flurry of activity surrounding implementation of NCLB’s student proficiency mandates, the federal requirement to have a “highly qualified” teacher in every classroom by 2005 seemed more like an impossible goal. The concern predated NCLB, of course: “Clinton Addresses U.S. Teacher Shortage” was a headline from August 2000. But NCLB’s demand that all new teachers hold at least a baccalaureate degree or higher, be fully licensed, and have demonstrated subject-matter competence in the areas they teach surely heightened the anxiety. However, 2005 has come and gone and the highly qualified–teacher crisis never happened. Why not?

The shortest answer is that the dearth of qualified teachers is largely a myth. So is the related notion that raising teachers’ pay across the board would bring significantly more qualified numbers to the profession. In fact, the resources provided to most public schools are adequate to recruit and retain a competent teaching workforce. A much more productive line of inquiry is one that explores the costs of the inefficient, rigid structure of the teacher compensation system and the possible benefits of replacing it with a more market-based system.

What factors do affect the market for teachers, anyway?

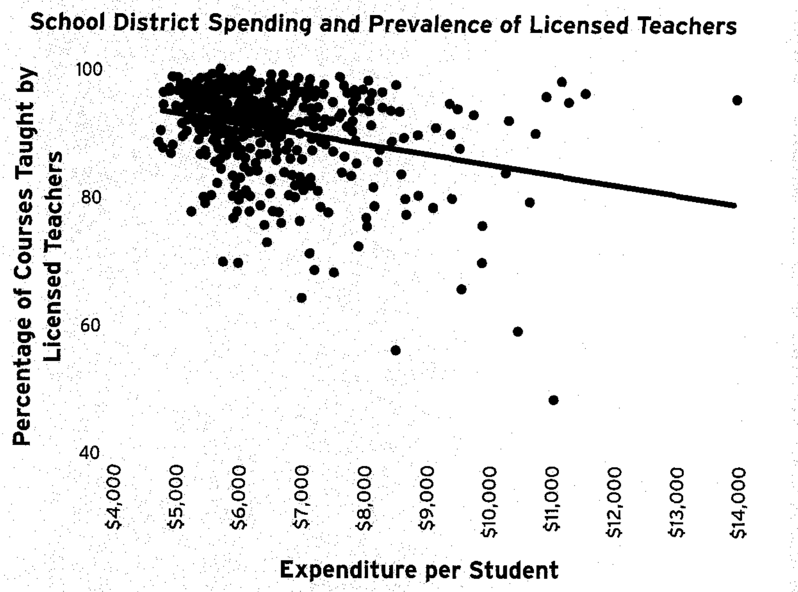
ILLUSTRATION / JT MORROW

In Search of a Qualified-Teacher Shortage

Are school districts really beset by a shortage of the qualified teachers needed to meet regulatory standards? Despite the headlines telling us of the teacher drought, there are at present no nationwide data that would help us answer this

Diminishing Returns (Figure 1)

Missouri school districts that spend more per pupil tend to have lower percentages of courses taught by licensed teachers.



Note: Expenditure per student is based upon average daily attendance. Teachers must be certified in the course subject matter to be considered licensed.

SOURCE: Missouri K–12 Public School Districts, 2001–02

question. One reason for this is that licensing standards vary from state to state. The most commonly used national data file, the Schools and Staffing Survey, includes a survey in which roughly 42,000 public school teachers were asked about their education backgrounds and teaching credentials. In the most recent available survey (1999–2000), 90 percent of public school teachers reported that they have regular state certification in their primary teaching area.

Ninety percent of public school teachers reported that they have regular state certification in their primary teaching area.

Administrative data from states or school-district report cards tend to reinforce these findings, even in those states that are said to have the most significant problems. California certainly represents one of the most highly stressed public-school systems in the nation. The school-age population is growing rapidly. The state has major fiscal difficulties. Much of the stress is self-inflicted: recall that in 1996 voters on a statewide ballot passed a class-size reduction initiative that greatly exacerbated teacher shortages and led to an exodus of teachers from many urban classrooms as suburban jobs opened up. In spite of these travails, in school year 2003–04, 89.4 percent of California public school teachers held full teaching credentials in their teaching area. Another 5.3 percent were in supervised intern or pre-intern programs. Only 5.2 percent were teaching with substandard credentials (emergency or waiver).

Still, virtually no school district is in full compliance with licensing laws. Missouri, for instance, tracks the percentage of courses taught by teachers with inappropriate licenses. During the 2002–03 school year, only two Missouri K–12 school districts had no courses taught by an inappropriately licensed teacher. The state average for teachers without proper credentials was 9.5 percent per district. Worth noting is that the prevalence of such teachers seems to have little to do with per pupil district spending. In fact, the district data show that higher spending per student is associated with a *decrease* in the percentage of courses taught by licensed teachers (see Figure 1).

Why is noncompliance unrelated to spending? Presumably, districts with higher relative pay would have lower turnover and thus fewer vacancies. They would also have larger applicant pools and thus more qualified applicants per vacancy.

But consider teacher licensing laws in Missouri. Like most other states, Missouri issues a single license to practice medicine, law, dentistry, accounting, nursing, and veterinary medicine. However, in the area of K–12 education, its Department of Elementary and Secondary Education currently issues 260 different certificates and endorsements (171 vocational, 89 nonvocational). This is only part of the story. There are levels of certification (permanent or provisional) for all of these and a host of grandfathered codes. The result of all this is 781 valid certification codes in the master teacher-certification file. And there is nothing unique about Missouri.

Now combine this complex licensing system with the dynamics of the teacher labor market, and the result is less than complete compliance even under the best of conditions. At the district level, roughly 10–12 percent of teaching positions turn over each year. Many of the exits are temporary, for child rearing or other family matters, and roughly one-third of district-level turnover comprises interdistrict transfers of experienced teachers. Inevitably, many school administrators find themselves scrambling against short deadlines to fill classrooms with qualified teachers.

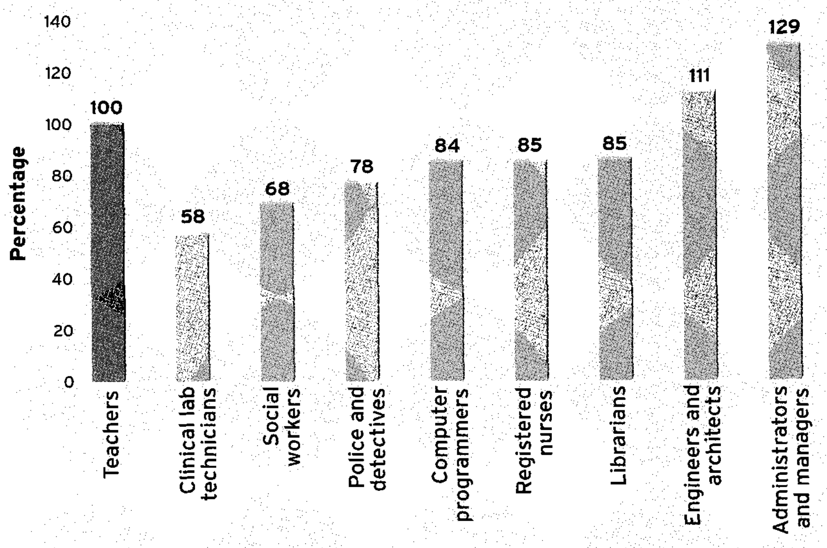
Even with qualified teachers available, some classrooms necessarily will be filled with teachers whose certification papers are not in order. Perhaps the teacher's license has expired and new approval is pending. Or maybe the state regulators have simply misplaced the certification paperwork.

Given the byzantine complexity of state teacher-licensing laws, the natural dynamics of the teacher labor market, and bureaucratic delay in granting and transferring credentials, full compliance is nearly impossible. Teacher labor markets likely have a natural rate of noncompliance that is above zero for many of the same reasons that the national economy has a "natural rate of unemployment" that is above zero. For this reason, it is unrealistic to hold school districts to a standard that requires perfect compliance with state licensing and NCLB requirements.

Underpaid? (Figure 2a)

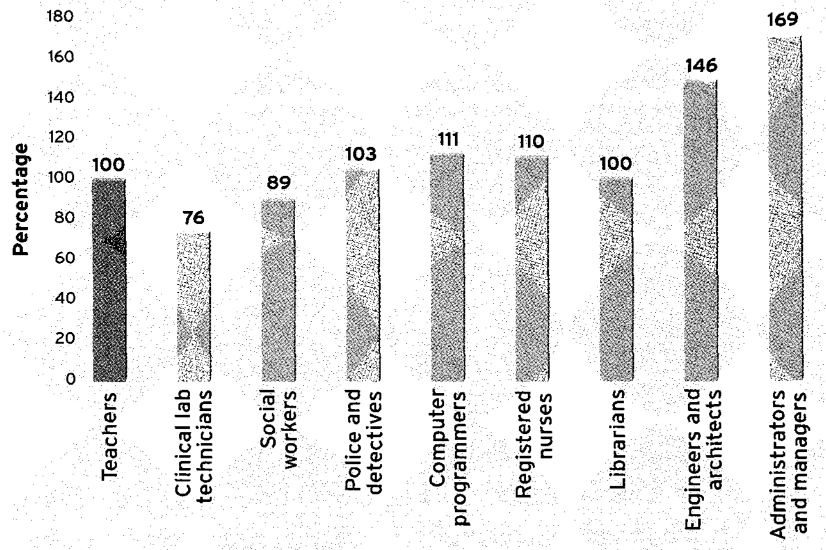
Teachers' weekly salaries are generally above those of other professionals . . .

Weekly Professional Salaries as a Percentage of Teacher Salaries



(Figure 2b) *. . . even though they earn less on an annual basis.*

Annual Professional Salaries as a Percentage of Teachers' Salaries



Note: Salary data for the 15 largest Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs) were used for the comparisons.

SOURCE: Author's calculations from the 2003 Bureau of Labor Statistics National Compensation Survey

Pay: Teachers Compared with Other Professionals

Interestingly enough, pay is not the main stumbling block to more, and more-qualified, teachers. Despite the conventional wisdom that teachers are underpaid relative to other professions (thereby depressing the quality of the pool of teachers that schools can recruit and retain), teachers are paid a salary that is comparable to that of other professionals.

I compared teacher and nonteacher pay for 2003 in the 15 largest metropolitan areas, accounting for roughly one-third of the U.S. population. We can safely assume that they represent roughly one-third of the public school teachers as well. For the comparison, I selected occupations for which college degrees (but generally not postgraduate degrees) are common or required and for which U.S. Department of Labor data are available for many of these metropolitan areas. I do not claim that these occupations represent the relevant nonteaching earnings for teachers in *all* fields, but they probably are relevant for some. More likely, these occupations represent the general wage structure in the local labor market. Most teachers take jobs near where they grew up or went to college. So it isn't national earnings of, say, computer analysts that matter; it's *the earnings of computer analysts in the local labor market*. The weekly salary calculations shown in Figure 2 are based on pay for weeks worked rather than weeks under contract. Measuring pay by weeks worked increases the weekly pay for nonteachers because they have more paid leave than teachers.

The analysis of these data shows that, in these 15 metropolitan areas, teachers have a very large premium in comparison with clinical lab technicians and social workers. Compared with librarians, teachers have virtual parity in annual earnings but a 20 percent premium in weekly earnings. Their annual pay is roughly 10 percent below computer programmers, but on a weekly basis is 20 percent above. Teachers' annual pay is less favorable than that of architects, engineers, managers, and administrators, but weekly pay is very similar. In sum, these data suggest that on a weekly basis, teachers' pay is quite competitive with that of many other professions.

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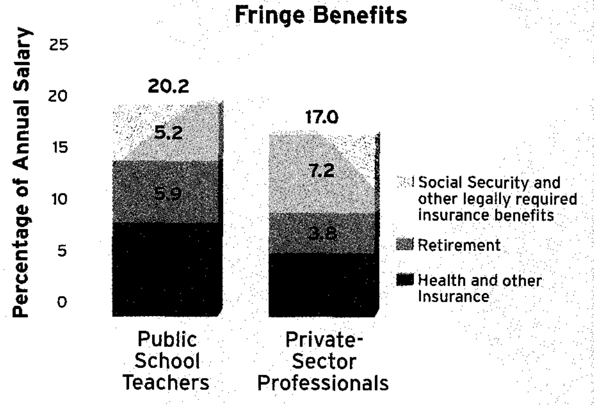
Fringe Benefits of Teaching (Figure 3)

The total fringe benefits paid on behalf of public school teachers are higher than those for private-sector workers.



Note: Private-sector workers include all management, professional, and related personnel. "Other legally required insurance" includes Medicare, state and federal unemployment insurance, and workers compensation. "Other insurance" includes life insurance and short- and long-term disability.

SOURCE: Bureau of Labor Statistics. "Employer Costs for Employee Benefits—June 2004"

Data from a survey of households by the Census Bureau's March 2003 Current Population Survey reinforces the findings based on the Department of Labor data. The data from this survey enable us to look at teachers' pay in both urban and rural areas. Since wages tend to be lower across the board in rural areas, one will overestimate the nationwide teacher versus nonteacher gaps unless one takes urban and rural pay differences into account. Once we do so, the annual pay of female teachers rises to 96 percent of that of other female college-educated workers. Thus, on a weekly basis, female teachers earn more on average than nonteachers.

Anecdotal data also suggest that, even setting aside the enormous benefit of the job security that accompanies tenure, the fringe benefits of public school teachers compare favorably with those in the private sector. According to recently released Department of Labor data, insurance (primarily health insurance) and retirement contributions are a substantially larger percentage of total compensation for teachers compared with professional employees in private-sector employment (see Figure 3). Most teachers are not covered by the federal Social Security system, so legally required contributions by their employers are somewhat smaller for teachers, but overall, benefits total 20.2 percent of payroll for teachers and 17.0 percent for private-sector managers and professionals.

Whether we look at salary or fringe benefits, there seems to be ample evidence that, when compared with other professions, teachers are paid adequately enough to attract qualified individuals to the job.

Better Teachers' Pay Does Not Mean Better Student Outcomes

Even if our nation's schools are not beset by a widespread shortage of qualified teachers and teachers are paid salaries comparable to other professionals, there are still those who believe that teachers' pay is too low, that their salaries are simply not commensurate with our expectations of a good education for our children. This conviction, which we can call "social underinvestment," views teachers' qualifications as a continuum. We are underinvesting in teacher quality in the sense that a dollar increase in teachers' pay would yield more than a dollar of benefit to society in the form of student achievement gains. However, research to date finds little evidence of a strong positive effect of teachers' pay on student achievement.

Research to date finds little evidence of a strong, positive effect of teachers' pay on student achievement.

One review finds that 14 of 17 studies that use student-level data and include measures of previous student achievement to assess the value that a teacher adds to student learning showed teachers' pay to have no effect on student achievement. Two sophisticated studies of teachers' effects conducted in 2005 cast further doubt on a positive wage effect. Brian Jacob and Lars Lefgren find no relationship between teachers' pay and their performance in a mid-sized, western school district (see "When Principals Rate Teachers," *research*, page 58); and Eric Hanushek, Steven Rivkin, and Daniel O'Brien, in a 2005 working paper published by the National Bureau of Economic Research, report no relationship between teacher productivity and changes in pay, suggesting that surrounding districts do not pull the most effective teachers from the city by offering higher salaries. Moreover, even in studies finding a positive effect, there is no evidence that across-the-board pay increases are a cost-efficient policy.

To supplement this research evidence, one can also learn from the private-school market for teachers. Suppose, for instance, that the benefits of higher teachers' pay did, in fact, outweigh the costs, and that public schools were setting teachers' pay inefficiently low. If that were the case, one would expect to see private schools, which operate in a very competitive market, paying teachers more. After all, private-school parents should be willing to pay higher tuition to support higher-quality teachers if it enhances their own children's achievement. And many of these same parents will soon be paying college tuition rates, far in excess of those in K–12.

There are, of course, legitimate objections to public–private comparisons. First, many private schools have a religious orientation and are staffed by teachers of the same religious denomination. To the extent that such schools are advancing a religious mission, they and their teachers are not comparable to public K–12 schools. Second, private schools are generally more selective in admissions than public

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schools and, on average, have students with higher socioeconomic status. To the extent that this results in better-behaved and more academically motivated students in private-school classrooms, it makes for a more attractive teaching environment.

I attempted to compare public and private school teachers' salaries in a way that would address these concerns. I analyzed earnings data only for private school teachers in nonreligious private schools. In addition, I excluded private schools that have a special emphasis (such as special education, Montessori, Waldorf) and focused on schools that most closely resemble traditional public schools in mission.

Even with these adjustments, the data suggest that private school teachers earn only 87 percent on average of what public school teachers earn. A critic of private–public comparisons might still argue that private school teaching is not comparable to public school teaching since the socioeconomic status of the former students is higher. In order to make public schools more comparable to private ones, therefore, I exclude more than 90 percent of the public school teacher sample and retain public school teachers only in low-poverty (less than 5 percent eligible for free or reduced-price lunch) suburban schools. In such cases, private school teachers earn even less, just 80 percent of what their public school counterparts earn. And not only are private school salaries lower, but the benefits are lower as well.

It is possible that teachers find the ability of private schools to exclude unruly students a form of "compensation," but the fact that we observe selective private schools paying much lower teachers' salaries suggests that whatever positive effects higher teachers' pay could have on teachers' quality, administrators must believe that the outlay would not produce commensurate benefits in student achievement, or at least benefits of sufficient magnitude that parents would be willing to pay for them.

The Bottom Line

In the end, the most reasonable standard for determining if teachers' pay or quality is adequate is whether a district is meeting current regulatory standards. Some skeptics argue that qualified-teacher standards are not very high. And no doubt there is some merit in this charge. But what standards do we use?

However seriously we may wish to improve student achievement through higher teacher quality, the research to date does not provide observable buttons to push. In fact, the evidence linking any type of teacher training, licensing, or testing to student achievement is mixed at best. While measures of teachers' general academic skills, such as SAT scores and college selectivity, are often statistically significant predictors of teachers' effectiveness in raising student achievement, their effects are modest in size.

All of this virtually guarantees shortages, or recruitment difficulties, in some fields and schools at some time, even if the overall level of resources for pay and benefits in the district are more than adequate. For example, in 2004 there were 25 applicants for every elementary-school vacancy in Missouri, but just 5 for each chemistry opening. If a single-salary schedule for a school district yields a large surplus of qualified applicants for elementary education, social studies, and physical education, but no qualified applicants in physics or speech pathology, is teachers' pay in this district adequate? By suppressing performance or field-based pay differentials, these schedules may be driving able teachers out of the profession. A district that insists it must raise the pay of all teachers in the district because it cannot recruit a certified speech pathologist is not spending money wisely.

By suppressing performance or field-based pay differentials, these schedules may be driving able teachers out of the profession.

Finally, state licensing standards must have some flexibility. As noted above, the large number of certifications and endorsements guarantees that virtually no district can assure that every class will be taught by a teacher with the right certificate and endorsement. Indeed, most of the "out of field" teaching in public schools would disappear overnight if states issued a single license in K–12 teaching as they do in medicine, law, accounting, and other professions. Short of that, aggressive development of "alternative route" licensing programs that target existing vacancies holds considerable promise. Teachers in some small rural schools cannot be licensed in every field in which their teaching skills are required. Here, too, licensing standards must have some flexibility.

In short, there may be a good case for raising the pay of some teachers—such as those in fields or schools that are difficult to staff or who are exceptionally effective in the classroom. However, there is little evidence that across-the-board increases in relative pay for all teachers are necessary to staff public schools with qualified teachers.

Michael Podgursky is professor of economics at the University of Missouri–Columbia.

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feature

The Virtual Revolution

UNDERSTANDING ONLINE SCHOOLS

No doubt the Internet has had a profound effect on our lives, our work and play, our politics, and our business. But in the middle of a revolution that seems so profound, no one is yet quite certain what the landscape will look like when the electronic dust settles. Some believe that schools have come late to the revolution; some would say late is good. For better or worse, though, the Internet is beginning to liberate education from the confines of traditional time and space.

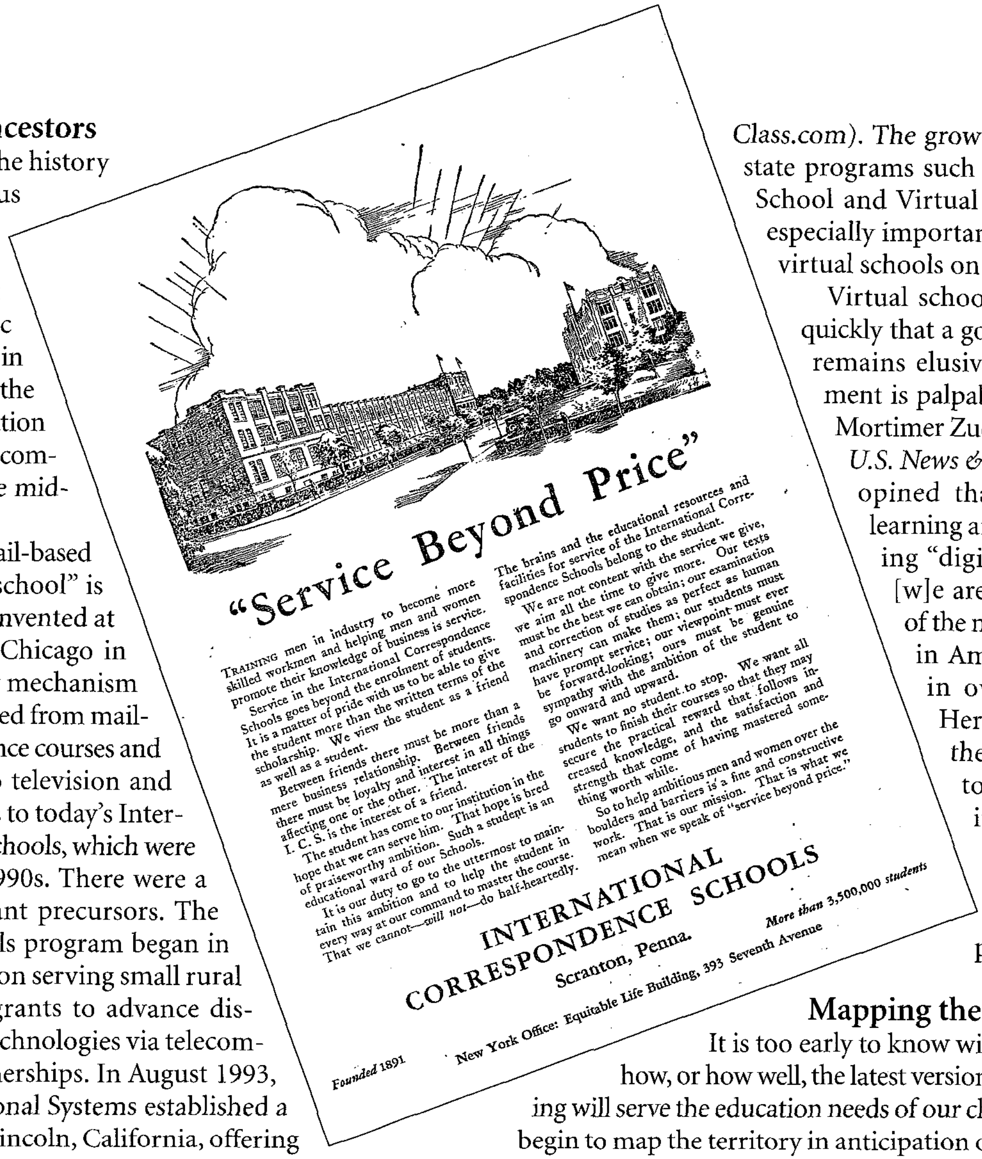
According to the U.S. Department of Education (DOE), during the 2002–03 school year (the last data available), 36 percent of U.S. school districts (5,500 out of 15,040) had students enrolled in distance-education programs, and 38 percent of public high schools offered distance-education courses. The DOE study had 328,000 students in 8,200 public schools enrolled in distance-education courses. As of November 2005, the North American Council for Online Learning (NACOL) listed 157 unique online learning programs in 42 states in its database, including 32 virtual charter schools, 3 online home-school programs, and 53 public, non-charter virtual schools that offer programs. The DOE's 2004 National Education Technology Plan predicted that with the "explosive growth in the availability of online instruction and virtual schools … we may well be on our way to a new golden age in American education." Virtual schools have arrived—and with them, a host of challenges to our notions about school and schooling.

What will the new landscape look like? Will it be one without class periods, grade levels, six-hour school days, or 180-day school years? Will it even need school buildings, classrooms, or district boundaries?

Those questions are no longer the stuff of education science fiction.

BY RANDALL GREENWAY AND GREGG VANOUREK

ILLUSTRATION BY ANDY LACKOW



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Our Virtual Ancestors

Most accounts of the history of schooling take us from fee-based schools in ancient Athens, to the first tax-funded public schools in our land in Boston in 1635, to the compulsory education of Horace Mann’s “common school” in the mid-19th century.

The modern mail-based “correspondence school” is said to have been invented at the University of Chicago in 1891. The delivery mechanism subsequently evolved from mail-based correspondence courses and radio programs to television and satellite broadcasts to today’s Internet-based virtual schools, which were launched in the 1990s. There were a couple of important precursors. The federal Star Schools program began in 1988, with a focus on serving small rural schools through grants to advance distance-education technologies via telecommunications partnerships. In August 1993, Horizon Instructional Systems established a charter school in Lincoln, California, offering a range of innovative programs, including an “electronically assisted student teaching” program that blended home-based computers with distance learning and satellite technology.

The first incarnation of what we think of as a K–12 virtual school appears to have been launched in the summer of 1995, with the CyberSchool Project in Eugene, Oregon. Started by nine district teachers, it offered supplemental online high-school courses. By 1996 the virtual fire was beginning to blaze: an experimental WebSchool in Orange County, Florida (a precursor to the Florida Online High School), offered online courses to local students; Federal Way School District in Washington State founded the CyberSchool Academy with nearly 50 students (both elementary and secondary); the Concord Virtual High School (later to be called Virtual High School) was awarded a $7.5 million federal Technology Innovation Challenge Grant; and the University of Nebraska–Lincoln was awarded a combination of grants to research and develop Internet-based high-school courses (later marketed by a for-profit enterprise called Class.com). The growth of large, multistate programs such as Florida Virtual School and Virtual High School was especially important in putting K–12 virtual schools on the map.

Virtual schools are growing so quickly that a good count of them remains elusive. But the excitement is palpable, even if hyped. Mortimer Zuckerman, owner of *U.S. News & World Report*, has opined that, with distance learning and its accompanying “digital revolution … [w]e are on the threshold of the most radical change in American education in over a century.… Here with the Web is the way for America to use the marvels it created to end the regression in our competitive and academic performance.”

Mapping the Frontier

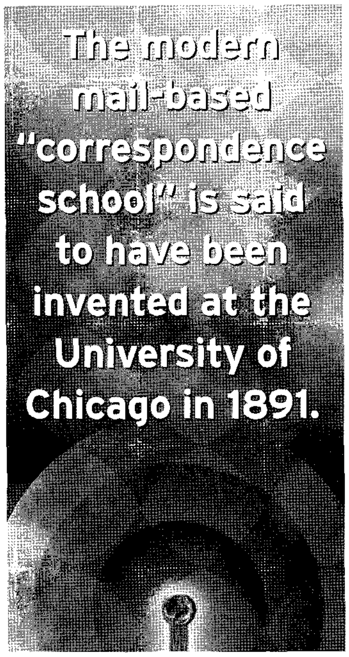
It is too early to know with much certainty how, or how well, the latest version of distance learning will serve the education needs of our children, but we can begin to map the territory in anticipation of studies to come. First, however, a note about terms. In Alaska and Pennsylvania, the programs are called “cyber” schools; in Minnesota and Colorado they are “online” schools; and Ohio prefers “e-schools.” They are essentially the same: education delivered primarily over the Internet.

Some people confuse virtual schools with home schooling, or with charter schools. The truth is that virtual schooling is more like a hybrid of public, charter, and home schooling, with ample dashes of tutoring and independent study thrown in, all turbocharged by Internet technology.

Most attempts to define virtual schools sort them into categories based on their operating entity. The problem, though, is that they mix critical distinctions and miss the full array of elements. We have identified six defining dimensions of “virtual” schooling: comprehensiveness (whether the activity is complete or supplemental), reach (whether spanning a district or the entire globe or something in between), type (whether public, private, charter, contract, magnet, or even home school), location (in school, at home, somewhere else, or a combination), delivery (synchronous or asynchronous), and control (run by a school district, university, state, other provider, or combination). It is important for those who authorize and regulate these newfangled schools to fully understand the complexities in order to ask the right questions and review them against a set of rubrics that will ensure education quality while protecting the flexibility that is inherent in the virtual environment.

Perhaps the best way to think about a virtual school is to think of a regular school without the building. Students and teachers are at home—or anywhere there is an Internet connection, the equivalent of the cars and buses that take them to school. As with other schools, most virtual schools still have a central office, administrators, teachers, professional development, curriculum, daily attendance, grades, report cards, parent conferences, special-education and health services, field trips, rules, discipline infractions, state reporting, school board meetings, and even disgruntled parents. But they no longer have to be housed in big brick-and-mortar buildings.

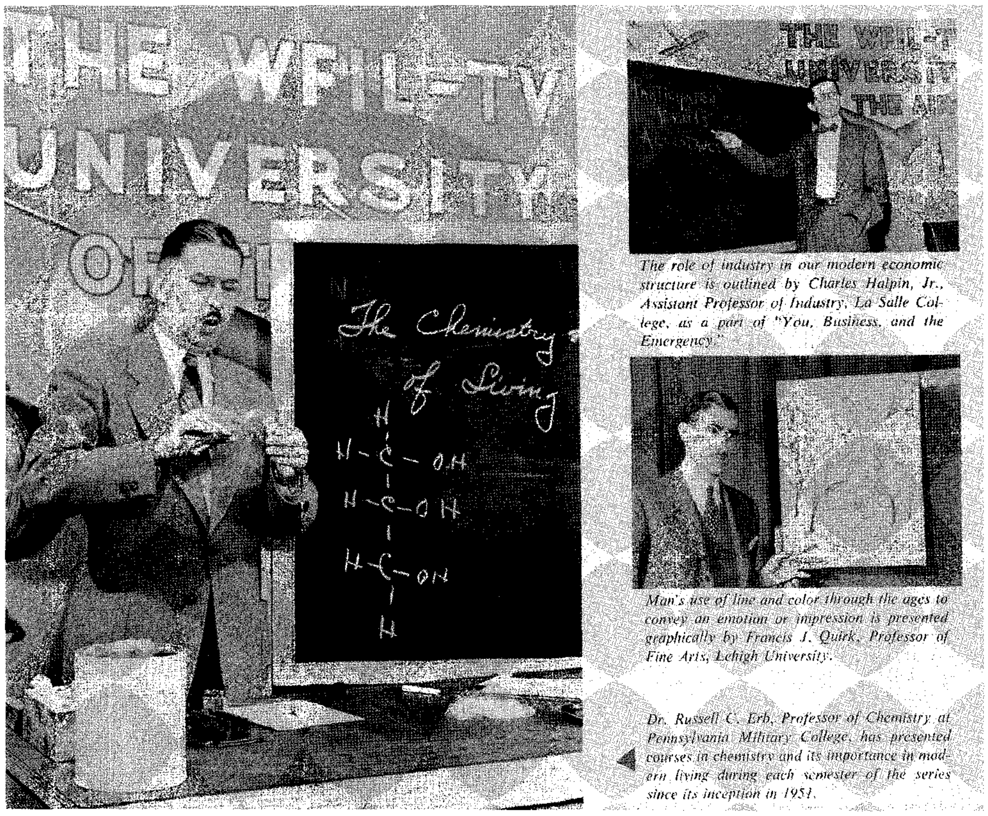
Here is what several of the more-established virtual schools "look" like:



The modern mail-based "correspondence school" is said to have been invented at the University of Chicago in 1891.

- The Florida Virtual School (FLVS) is a state-operated program founded in 1997 serving more than 33,000 students in grades 6–12. FLVS is a supplemental online program, with students averaging 1.7 courses, and it provides courses to public, private, and home-schooled students. Students receive some instructional materials, but not a computer or Internet access. Teachers and students interact through e-mail, telephone, and instant messaging (IM). Teachers are available from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. weekdays. Students set their own schedule and can access all assignments, but must obtain teacher approval to access tests and quizzes. Students must submit a certain number of assignments each week as specified by the teacher, and each course includes a "pace chart" with traditional, extended, or accelerated options. FLVS also provides courses to schools in other states through contractual tuition agreements with school districts and states.

- The Arkansas Virtual School (ARVS), where one of us works, is a pilot program for students in grades K–8 that has been operated since 2003 by the Arkansas Department of Education in partnership with K12 Inc., an online curriculum company. It offers only a full-time program. Upon enrollment, each student receives a computer (on loan), Internet access, and an array of school materials including textbooks, science equipment, math manipulatives, art supplies, maps, videos, and more. Working from home, its 430 students spend less than 20 percent of their time online in the elementary grades and about 40 percent in the middle-school grades. Teachers monitor student progress and attendance from their home offices and interact with parents and students via phone, e-mail, instant messaging, web conferencing, and occasional in-person visits. Students attend school-sponsored field trips (for example, museums, libraries, zoos, and family picnic outings) and participate in all state testing programs.



The role of industry in our modern economic structure is outlined by Charles Halpin, Jr., Assistant Professor of Industry, La Salle College, as a part of "You, Business, and the Emergency."

Man's use of line and color through the ages to convey an emotion or impression is presented graphically by Francis J. Quirk, Professor of Fine Arts, Lehigh University.

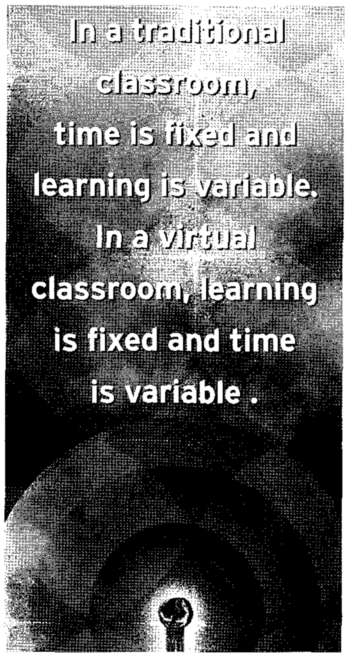
Dr. Russell C. Erb, Professor of Chemistry at Pennsylvania Military College, has presented courses in chemistry and its importance in modern living during each semester of the series since its inception in 1951.

PHOTO / TRIANGLE PUBLICATIONS, INC.

In 1951, WFIL-TV in Philadelphia broadcast The University of the Air *as one of the first educational television programs.*

- The Cyber Village Academy (CVA) in Minnesota was originally set up in 1998 to be the first online learning charter school to serve seriously ill children (often home- or hospital-bound) and home schoolers—now a total of 140 students in grades 4–8. The school's founders devised a unique model to serve them: Most CVA students attend on-campus classes with licensed teachers two days a week and "attend" school from home three days a week, completing online learning activities via a Microsoft e-learning platform, a daily bulletin system, e-mail, and a synchronous classroom tool using an interactive whiteboard and an audio bridge. In other words, students at home actually "dial in" to the on-campus classroom and can hear the teachers (who use a wireless microphone) and see and interact with the lesson on their computer screen.

- The Delta Cyber School is a fully accredited charter school in central Alaska serving about 425 students statewide in grades K–12 since its inception in 1997. The school offers a combination of packaged online programs and teacher-created lessons supplemented by commercial online programs, all flowing through a Blackboard Learning System. It offers two foreign languages and courses in fine arts, auroras, NASA, oceanography, zoology, and botany.



> In a traditional classroom, time is fixed and learning is variable. In a virtual classroom, learning is fixed and time is variable.

Students communicate via web conferencing and an internal messaging system and take self-grading quizzes online, conduct online research projects, and click through online reviews. About half the students access their classes from separate brick-and-mortar schools all over the state, while others log in from home, some from nearly a thousand miles away.

Old and New

Though virtual schools, like traditional schools, have a central office, administrators, teachers, curriculum, daily attendance, grades, report cards, professional development, parent conferences, special-education, health services, field trips—even school board meetings (though often conducted remotely)—there are important differences from their nonvirtual cousins: greater dependence on technology; more individualized, interactive, and self-paced instruction; complicated logistical issues due to the dispersion of students; different kinds of socialization (some face-to-face, some virtual); no snow days.

One of the key differences relates to time and learning. In a traditional classroom, time is fixed and learning is variable (that is, classes are held for a set period of time, and when the bell rings the amount of learning that has occurred varies, sometimes dramatically, by student). In a virtual classroom, learning is fixed and time is variable (that is, the lesson continues until each student achieves mastery).

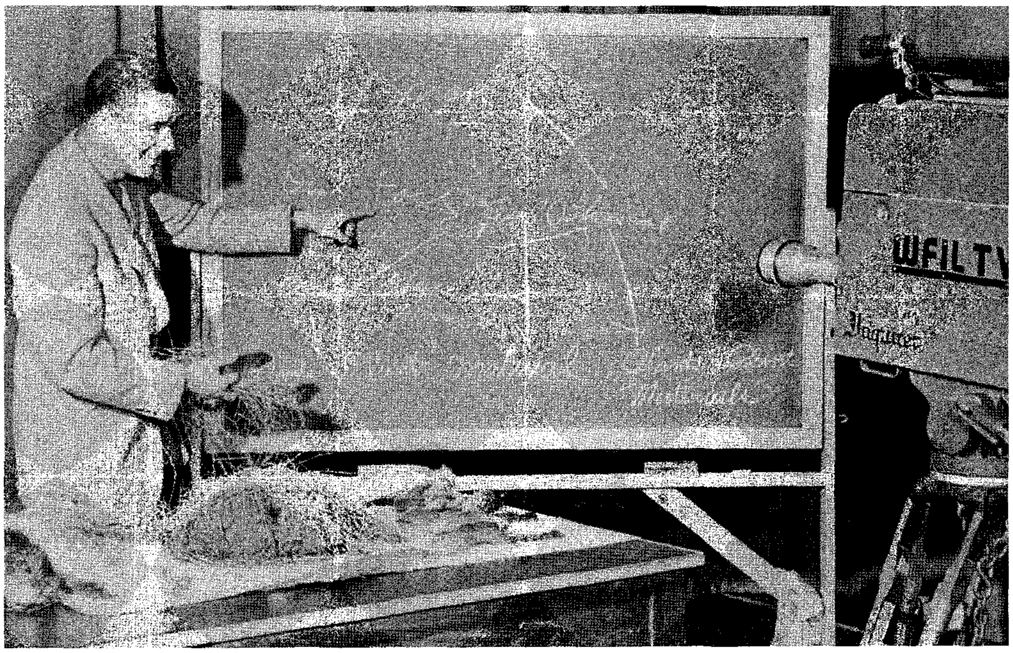


PHOTO / TRIANGLE PUBLICATIONS, INC.

The delivery mechanism for virtual schooling subsequently evolved from mail-based correspondence courses and radio programs to television.

What does virtual schooling mean in practice for families, students, and teachers? Though the models vary, we can provide a basic snapshot. Families begin with the enrollment process—completing online forms and submitting the required residency documentation. Upon enrollment, students often receive a computer on loan from the school and reimbursement for Internet access—as well as the necessary books, supplies, and other instructional materials necessary for the program. (Some virtual schools are completely online while others rely heavily on physical materials.)

In a "typical" day (see sidebar), a student might take mostly core courses with some electives and log on to the computer for an hour or two, clicking through interactive lessons with text, audio or video clips, Flash animation, and links to related sites; completing an online math quiz; e-mailing the teacher; and "chatting" with classmates online. Students complete the majority of their work *offline* in many of these online schools, for example, reading assignments, drafting an essay, conducting an experiment with school-supplied materials, and studying for an exam. (Here we must pause to notice how much of what happens in virtual schools is so oddly "unvirtual.") A parent or other responsible adult is asked to supervise—and sometimes to assist with instruction and motivation, all under the direction of a licensed teacher. (Some virtual schools don't incorporate much parental involvement at all, but others, especially in the younger grades, rely on a close partnership among parents, teachers, and online lessons to facilitate student learning.) All students in public virtual schools take state tests. In addition, many students participate in extracurricular activities provided by their schools.

Depending on the school, teachers work out of a school office building or from their homes (with school-supplied computers, Internet access, and training). Teachers may develop courses; assign lessons and homework; monitor student attendance and progress; provide feedback through phone conferences, e-mail, instant messaging, or web conferencing; grade assignments; collect student portfolios; attend field trips; proctor state exams; and more. Sometimes teachers meet face to face with students. Teachers often design individual learning plans for their students based on placement tests, standardized test results, parental input, and student interests.

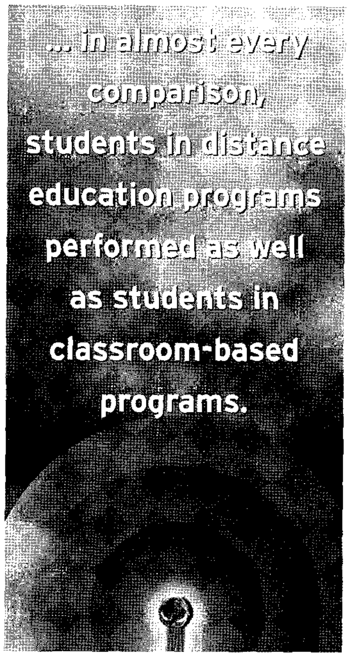
Future Schooling Today:
A "Day in the Life" of a 6th-Grade Virtual Student*

Time	Activity
7:00 a.m.	Wakes up, gets dressed, and eats breakfast
8:15	Logs on to his personalized school page and reviews his lessons scheduled for the day
8:40	American History: reviews notes on the French and Indian War; writes a diary entry in his history journal from the perspective of an officer in the Virginia militia serving with General Washington; reads chapter 3 on the role of the Iroquois Indians
10:00	Language Arts: reviews words for today's spelling test; completes lesson on revising and proofreading an essay; completes grammar, usage, and mechanics lesson on the use of irregular verbs; completes vocabulary lesson on root words
11:45	Break/free time
12:00 p.m.	Lunch with mom and younger sister
12:30	Takes Spelling test
12:45	Reading time (continuation of literature lesson from yesterday): *A Wrinkle in Time*, by Madeline L'Engle
1:30	Pre-Algebra: *reviews lesson on "Using Variables: Writing Inequalities"*; completes practice problems in textbook; takes quiz on algebra lesson
2:30	Science: checks on science experiment and records changes in science journal
2:45	Break/free time
3:30	Soccer practice
5:00	Free time with friends
6:00	Dinner with family: discusses day's lessons with parents
6:45	More free time
7:30	Logs on to personalized school page to review tomorrow's lessons in Science, Language Arts, Pre-Algebra, and Art
7:45	Reading time: literature (continued)
9:00	Bedtime

*Based on real students' schedules.

For Whom the Mouse Clicks

Virtual schools appeal to a wide array of students, attracting children from both ends of the achievement spectrum. Self-paced study allows struggling students to catch up without a classroom full of distractions and enables advanced students to accelerate their work according to their own abilities and without bogging them down in "busywork." Families choose virtual schools for many reasons: curriculum quality or focus, individualized instruction, flexible scheduling, interest in technology, and more. Most students in virtual schools transfer into them from traditional public schools, but many home-school students transfer into them to connect with other learners and professional staff or to access the credibility of accredited programs. Students with intensive acting or athletics regimens and children of high-mobility military families are served well by the flexibility. Urban parents may want to address safety or overcrowding concerns, while rural parents may seek advanced or specialized academic offerings not available locally. (According to the College Board, about 43 percent of U.S. high schools, many of them rural, do not offer Advanced Placement courses.)


... in almost every comparison, students in distance education programs performed as well as students in classroom-based programs.

Of course, virtual schools have their challenges. Surely, they are not for everybody. They often face difficulties in serving students with limited English proficiency, visual impairments, severe or multiple disabilities, and motivation problems. They also ask teachers to learn new technologies and approaches. According to the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (NCREL), "It is likely that less than 1 percent of all teachers nationwide are trained as online teachers. The intensity, duration, and quality of staff development for online teachers appear to vary significantly." According to *Education Week*, only 11 states require at least some of their online teachers to receive training in online instruction. Virtual-school teachers need training on a variety of software applications, basic hardware maintenance, effective communication strategies (such as effective writing techniques for web-based lessons), information management skills, and instructional intervention strategies.

There are downsides to not having daily face-to-face interactions between students and teachers. Even though many virtual schools provide social opportunities, there is no denying the amenities of the comprehensive school: from jazz band, sports, and school plays to debate team, student councils, and proms. We have seen examples of chess clubs, sports teams, academic Olympiads, spelling bees, and science clubs organized by virtual schools, but rarely without logistical challenges.

Additionally, developing a high-quality virtual-learning program can be costly, requiring sizable capital expenditures on computers and servers, sophisticated instructional design (the orchestration of different media—such as online, offline, images, sound—into compelling and effective instructional units), content and course-management systems (computer systems for organizing and facilitating collaboration on documents and courses), course-authoring platforms (computer frameworks that allow educators to "post" their courses onto the Internet), and beta and usability testing (publishing test versions of new programs to eliminate the "bugs" and ensure ease of use). Too many programs simply load lessons developed for the traditional classroom directly onto the web without making adjustments for the new delivery methods; they are not likely to advance the "state of the art." We cannot assume that excellent teaching translates directly into excellent online lesson development.

Evidence of Effectiveness

While there are hundreds of reports on distance education, the research on virtual schooling is newer and slimmer. There is a large base of research on postsecondary distance learning and a growing base of research on virtual high schools, but very little research on K–8 virtual schools.

What we do know is that many comparative studies suggest that the distance-learning model can be as effective as the classroom model. A 2004 NCREL meta-analysis of 116 effect sizes from 14 web-delivered K–12 distance-education programs between 1999 and 2004 found "no significant difference in performance between students who participated in online programs and those who were taught in face-to-face classrooms ... in almost every comparison, students in distance education programs performed as well as students in classroom-based programs." A 2005 NCREL report draft (which we received special permission to cite for this article) finds "new evidence supporting the apparent effectiveness of online programs and schools and generally demonstrating the potential of online learning as a promising instructional intervention that can, when implemented judiciously, and with attention to 'evidence-based' practices, apparently improve student academic performance." However, it is clear that we need more data points and more rigorous methodological approaches. According to the 2005 NCREL report draft, "Only a small percent [of the hundreds of studies addressing distance education] meet established standards as experimental or quasi-experimental research."

What's more, the question about the comparative effectiveness of virtual schooling may be too blunt. We should also ask which *types* of virtual schools work, under what *conditions*, with which *students*, with which *teachers*, and with what *training*. Note also that most virtual schools receive significantly less funding than conventional schools—often 20 to 30 percent less (though there are no systematic and reliable data on funding rates or comparisons nationally)—leading to interesting questions about equity, parity, and productivity.

Reactions to This New Model

Not surprisingly, the rapid growth of virtual schooling has generated mixed reactions. Some parents and schools, as we have seen, seem to have voted with their virtual feet. But within the policy community, there is no clear consensus on how to "do virtual schools." In many cases, policies are being established after virtual schools are already up and running and by people without a good working understanding of how they operate. There is a seductive urge to regulate these schools using conventional bureaucratic protocols designed for physical schools. Not surprisingly, these approaches are outmoded in this new world and can end up hamstringing virtual schools by tying them to existing authorization regimes, salary schedules, certification requirements, textbook adoption processes, curriculum development processes, assessment procedures, and accreditation regimens.

Our own work with virtual schools has led us to a number of observations about their current practice that we believe can guide policymakers. First, the principles of quality education still hold. Just putting the word "virtual" in front of the word "school" doesn't make it good, bad, or even innovative anymore. What matters is the school's ability to educate children. The point of virtual learning is of course *learning*, not virtual technology. Without good curriculum, instruction, training, resources, support, and leadership, virtual schools will flounder. In good virtual schools, the technology is so powerful, well-designed, and intuitive that it becomes an afterthought.

Second, the politics of education also still hold. While virtual schools are not creatures of the Left or Right, they do run into the same roadblocks from special interest groups that other innovations encounter, usually centering on power and money. The roadblocks are especially severe when virtual schools also tie in with other controversial reforms, such as charter schools, contracting out to private management companies, and the interdistrict competition for students generated by open enrollment.

Third, we will always have a need for personal contact, and computers are no replacement for genuine human interaction—or for teachers and tutors. Though there are examples today of computer-based tutoring programs with artificial intelligence and offshore tutoring programs, these are not credible threats to the teaching profession. In the words of Katherine Endacott, CEO of Class.com, "This is another model. It won't replace a classroom, and it won't replace a teacher."

Fourth, virtual schools are not for everybody (nor are they meant to be). According to Tom Scullen, superintendent in Appleton, Wisconsin (which has experimented with virtual schools), "This type of school is not for everyone, but for the kids who need it, this may be their best—or even only—opportunity to succeed."

Finally, this is just the beginning. Over a century we have witnessed steady evolution of distance-learning approaches, structures, and technologies. We don't know what's next, but we can be confident that, as the technology continues its headlong leap to new frontiers and as we understand more about what works (and what doesn't), the education benefits will surely increase with them. Clearly, the use of technology in education will continue to expand and evolve. As one high-school student aptly put it, "we have technology in our blood."

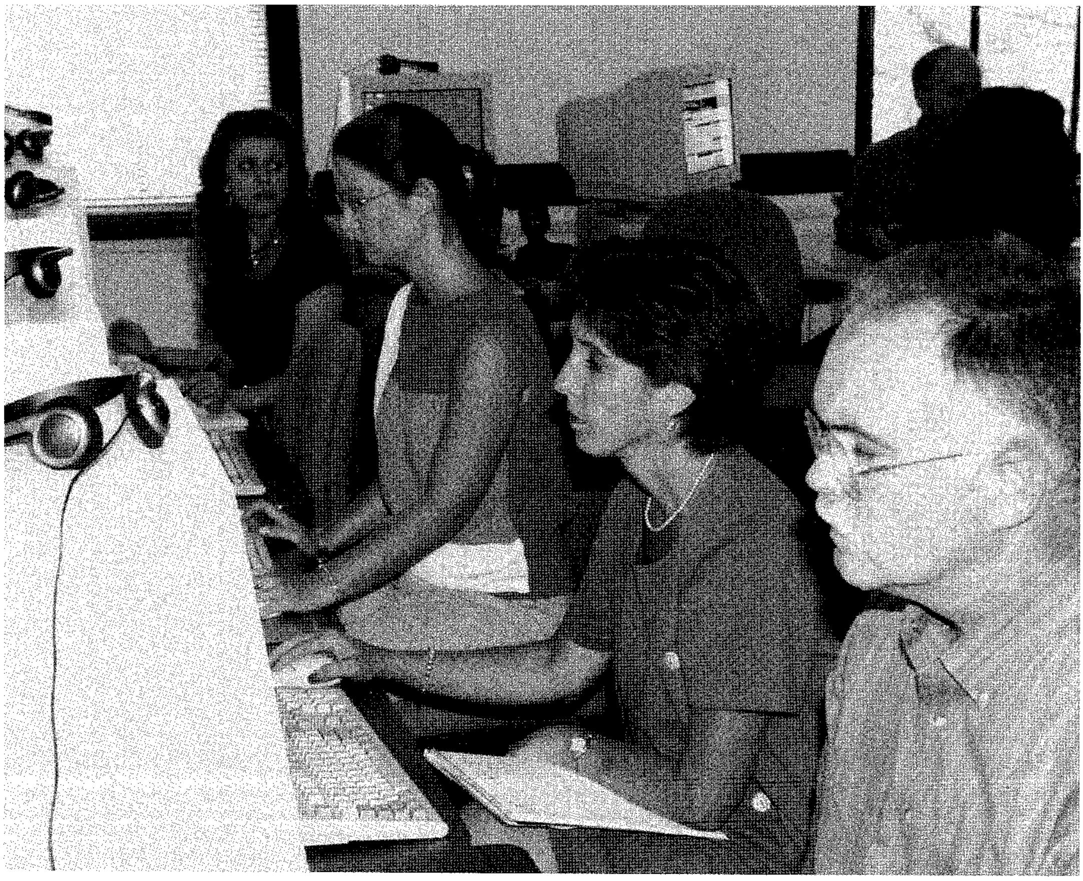
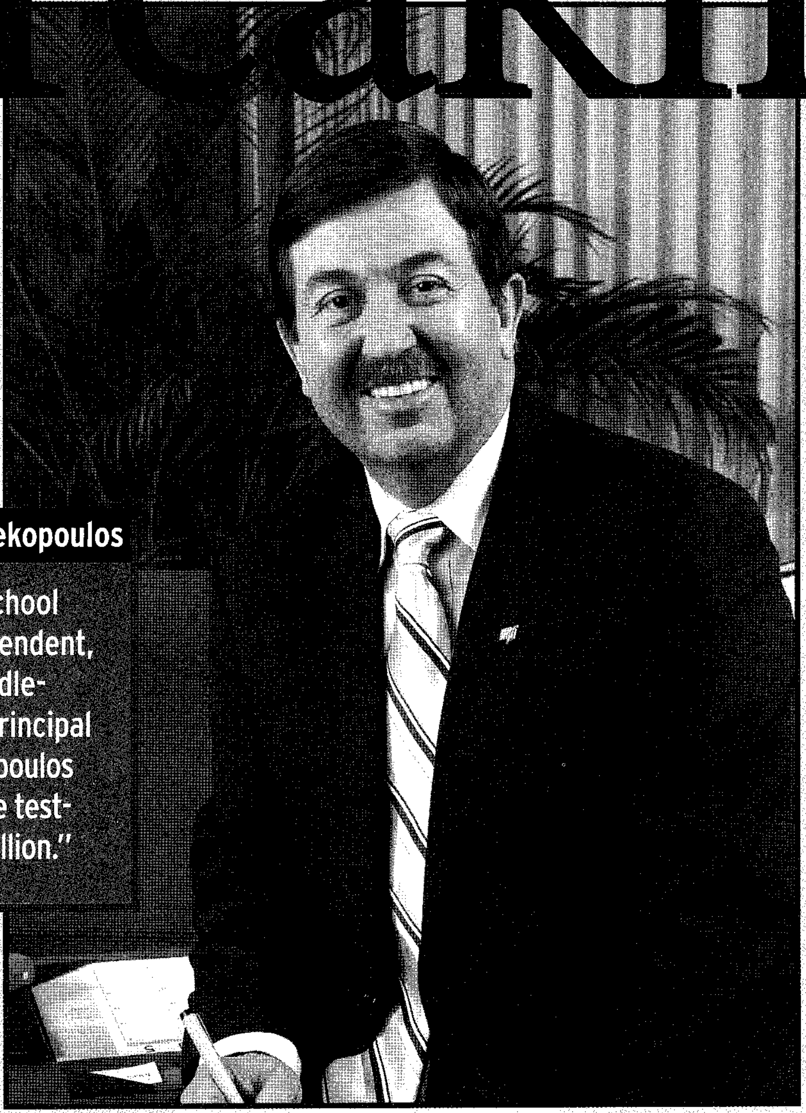


PHOTO / AOHS

E-teacher applicants complete an online seminar to be certified for the Alabama Online High School.

Randall Greenway is head of school of the Arkansas Virtual School and a former state department of education official, high-school principal, and teacher. Gregg Vanourek is a consultant, writer, and former executive at K12 Inc.

Breaking the



Bill Andrekopoulos

Now a school superintendent, as a middle-school principal Andrekopoulos lead "the test-box rebellion."

PHOTO / JOHN SALLER

It was the kind of defiant act that most school principals probably have contemplated wistfully at one time or another. Disgusted by what he and his staff considered to be poorly written, poorly stapled, and generally disorganized mandatory citywide exams sent to Fritsche Middle School by the Milwaukee Public Schools central office in the fall of 1999, Principal Bill Andrekopoulos committed an act of ownership theretofore unheard of in the 100,000-student school district. Andrekopoulos and his staff stuffed the exams back into the box and shipped them back, Return to Sender. They included a brief message: What you produced wasn't good enough for our students. Please try again.

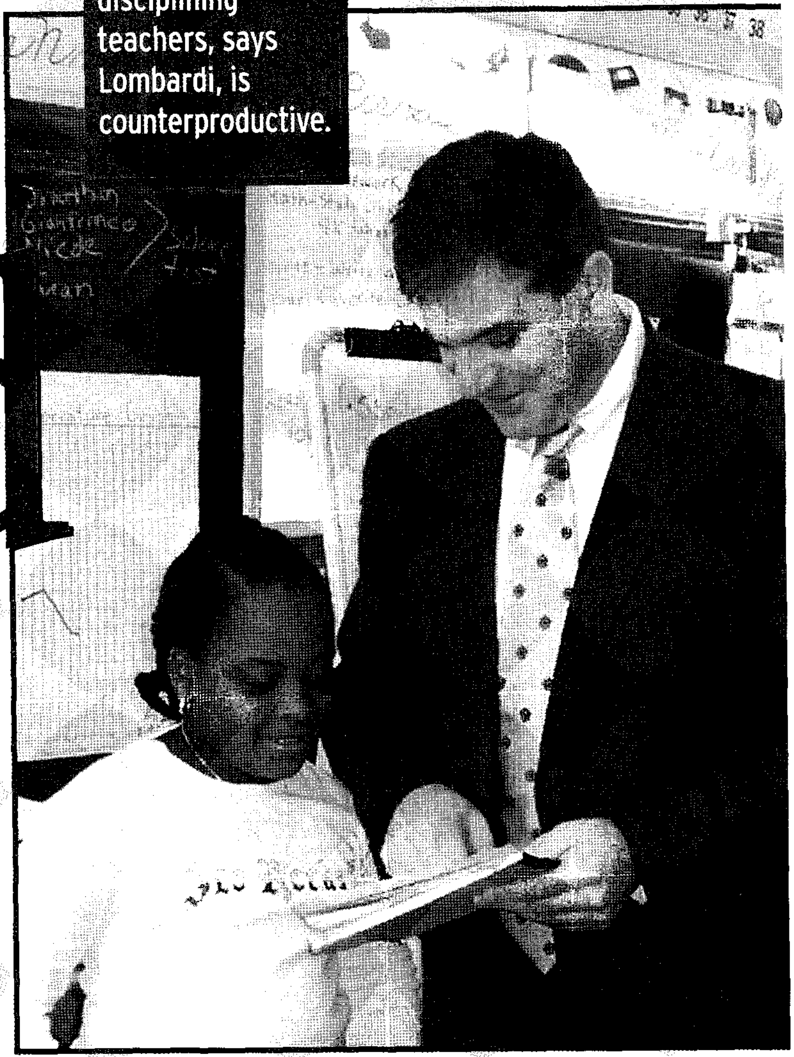
Among schools all across Milwaukee that autumn, word about the test-box rebellion spread quickly, if only because acts of subversion were such rarities in a system where power was closely held by bureaucrats and where schools were expected to respect, honor, and obey the central office.

At a time when Milwaukee's schools were attempting to show they could compete with new publicly funded alternatives, Fritsche Middle School became the poster child for public schools' trying to reinvent themselves. Andrekopoulos, who at the time was a student of a national performance-management program, proved what could be done when sound decisions were made by entrepreneurial leaders at the school

Mold

BY JOE WILLIAMS

How Do School Entrepreneurs Create Change?



Anthony Lombardi

The standard manual for disciplining teachers, says Lombardi, is counterproductive.

PHOTO / ANTHONY LOMBARDI

level rather than at the central office. (To remind the bureaucrats in the Milwaukee Public Schools that they existed to serve their school, for example, the Fritsche team later developed a report card, which it used to grade all of the various central office departments, based primarily on the value added each provided for Fritsche's teachers and students.)

Do Andrekopoulos and Fritsche Middle School represent the future of American education? Or are they the exceptions that prove the rule about immovable bureaucracies? Though it could be a bit of both, there is increasing evidence to suggest that entrepreneurship can, and does, exist *within* the modern public-sector education system.

More educators and school leaders are taking risks to transform their classrooms, schools, and districts. They take ownership of the success or failure of everything that happens under their watch, often welcoming innovative ways of improving the delivery of education to students. In many cases, these public-sector school entrepreneurs have a keen ability to recognize opportunities that exist for improvements to (or abandonment of) the status quo in their schools and to find imaginative ways to take advantage of those opportunities to benefit students.

Modern public-school systems have a poor track record in taking bold steps to solve clearly identified problems. Poor student achievement in the general sense has been widely documented and reported, as has the significant achievement gap that exists between white students and their black and Hispanic counterparts. Instead of changing to solve the performance problems, however, our public-school system seems to have absorbed them, made them part of the system.

The plethora of choices available to Milwaukee's parents has forced the Milwaukee schools over time to be more responsive and enterprising. As Andrekopoulos says, "Innovation is now part of our DNA."

Schools like Fritsche in Milwaukee have historically been the exception within public education. Increasingly, though, the trends that made Fritsche possible, including strong leadership in the principal's office and shifts in power caused by private-school vouchers and charter schools, are apparent throughout the United States.

Andrekopoulos advised other schools in the district on how to control their own destinies, then went on to become the superintendent of the Milwaukee Public Schools in 2002. He described the new environment: "It's a matter of schools' self-actualizing and pushing the school community to take on a leadership role, to take ownership." The plethora of choices available to Milwaukee's parents has forced the Milwaukee schools over time to be more responsive and enterprising. As Andrekopoulos says, "Innovation is now part of our DNA."

The New Educators

Not every education entrepreneur is a Bill Andrekopoulos. But the increasing number of such risk-takers suggests that there are others out there and that they may just be changing the landscape of education. They are independent thinkers, creative bureaucrats; their efforts are being encouraged by programs like Teach For America, alternative certification programs like New York City's Teaching Fellows, and leadership training initiatives like the Leadership Academy and Urban Network for Chicago, New York City's Leadership Academy, and San Diego's Institute for Learning.

The upside of these programs is that they attract professionals who are less inclined to settle for bureaucratic inertia and incompetence and care little what is said about them in the teachers' lounge or at the administrator's conference table. They are the kinds of teachers and administrators willing to go public, in the press, at town hall meetings, or in Internet blogs, and they're not afraid to talk about real barriers that classroom teachers face within their school systems. Education writers across the nation are drawn to them because they are considerably more interesting than the status quo.

Mitch Kurz is one of these new educators. "I am determined to be a foot soldier in the movement to inject equity into our education system," said the 51-year-old executive. Kurz left his job managing 8,000 employees in 250 offices in 77 countries for the advertising firm Young and Rubicam in 2002 to teach in a Bronx middle school. He graduated from New York's Teaching Fellows program, created in 2000 by former chancellor Harold Levy, who himself left his job as a corporate lawyer for Citigroup to take on the nation's largest school system. Instead of three years at a teachers college talking about teaching in the abstract, Kurz participated in an intense summer program and then jumped right into the classroom while earning a master's in education at night through the teaching fellows program.

Beginning their work without formal pedagogical training in education schools, some of these career changers are more open than traditional entrants to the profession to discovering and implementing teaching methods that they can see work with their students. (For example, on leaving the advertising world, Kurz found classroom discipline to be the biggest challenge in his school, and he set out to find the best strategies to deal with disruptive students.) Critics have complained that such career changers are too inexperienced and ill-prepared to be helpful to children. Stanford's Linda Darling-Hammond has argued that they tend not to stick around in their jobs. Groups like Teach For America have disputed that concern, pointing to research it commissioned that found their corps members outperformed veteran and certified teachers in their schools.

Aside from friction created by education-school scholars like Darling-Hammond, however, career changers face other obstacles in school systems, which, at their core, tend to be disdainful of those who exercise initiative or who rock the boat. Many New York teaching fellows in the early years reported that they felt like second-class citizens in their schools and were even set up to fail by administrators who had little interest in seeing them succeed. Chuck Lavaroni, codirector of the International Academy for Educational Entrepreneurship (IAEE), notes, "While the 'system' says it respects and wants creativity, more often than not, it does nothing to encourage or support it." The IAEE, a California-based organization, encourages and supports teachers who turn innovative ideas about how to improve education into action. "The creative teacher," says Lavaroni, "often has to literally fight for time, money, resources, and/or equipment necessary to truly create and become involved in all aspects of the creative process. The 'system' makes it difficult for teachers to share ideas, plan mutual activities, and build upon each other's strengths and interests."

Sometimes teachers find themselves at odds with the school administration's low expectations for their students and staff. Zelman Bokser, 42, a Fulbright Scholar with a Ph.D. in music who had taught at the university level, couldn't have been hired as a New York City teacher without the alternative certification program because he didn't have the required education-school courses under his belt. But even after landing a teaching job in 2000, he had to overcome institutional habits that discouraged innovation. His proposal to teach violin to students in his struggling Brooklyn school was met with disbelief: "Too difficult," a waste of time. These kids had enough trouble getting through the school day, administrators counseled; why throw more hurdles their way? One administrator advised him to forget the whole idea, suggesting she was doing him a favor by preventing the failure that was sure to follow.

His proposal to teach violin to students in his struggling Brooklyn school was met with disbelief: "Too difficult," a waste of time. These kids had enough trouble getting through the school day, administrators counseled; why throw more hurdles their way?

But as a career changer with an attitude, Bokser didn't let the naysayers stop him. Two years later, as his students tuned their violins inside Manhattan's Hammerstein Ballroom for a performance welcoming that year's crop of new teaching fellows, Bokser reminded his peers what they were up against by telling the story of the nay-saying administrator.

Rebels with a Cause

Some call them crackerjacks, others call them hard-nosed, and still others would say they are just difficult. For our purposes, we'll refer to them here as education's James Deans; except that these subversives are rebels *with* a cause. Perhaps it's the principal in Queens, New York, who blatantly disregards the clear directions of her regional supervisors by throwing away the kindergarten curriculum because she has concluded that her kids haven't even come close to mastering the skills taught in the pre-kindergarten curriculum (instead using a pre-K curriculum that she has discovered produces better results). Or maybe it's the principal in Jersey City, New Jersey, who figures out it is easier and more efficient to get school supplies for her teachers by creating an account at the local Staples store than to go through central purchasing. These James Deans use what they consider to be common sense when picking and choosing their battles within the system's regulatory framework. Often they are driven by their determination to simply do the right thing.

Like some of the maverick school leaders in Milwaukee, the education rebels tend to become folk heroes of sorts, and they often have rather complicated power relationships with administrators and union leaders. They also tend to have a healthy chip on their shoulders and some degree of confidence in their own ability to make things happen. Often they remain employed only because they can point to measurable results and have used their entrepreneurial skills to create political support among key stakeholders like politicians, business leaders, parents, and the media. School superintendents tend to allow them to exist quietly at the margins rather than tempt the political fates by messing with them.

Anthony Lombardi, principal of Public School 49 in Middle Village, Queens, is a perfect example of a James Dean, but there are thousands of them quietly forging their way through dysfunctional school systems nationwide, getting the job done for their students and teachers. On Lombardi's desk, which he moved into the hallway to create more classroom space, are three portraits of Frank Sinatra and a copy of *Regulations and Procedures for Pedagogical Ratings.* He loves the crooner, but doesn't believe a word of *Regulations and Procedures.* For principals who want to rid their schools of incompetent teachers, the directions contained in the manual make disciplining bad teachers counterproductive. "It's impossible to prove incompetency," Lombardi says. In giving a teacher an "unsatisfactory" rating, a principal is preparing for a two-year process that may not even result in the teacher's being removed from the school. More important, once a teacher gets an "unsatisfactory" rating, he or she is prevented from transferring elsewhere, further adding to the probability that such ratings are futile exercises for school leaders.

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Lombardi is obviously not the first principal to figure this out: of the city's 80,000 school teachers, only a few hundred a year on average receive ratings of "unsatisfactory" from their principals. Lombardi's entrepreneurial skills, however, persuaded him not to give up. Rather than avoiding paperwork, he crafted careful memos to all of his teachers based on his in-class observations. He drafted detailed plans for improvement for each teacher, set the bar high, and encouraged all of his teachers to work according to high professional standards. In short, he created a climate in which his weakest teachers found themselves asking whether they even wanted to stick around at the school to see whether or not they could rise to the occasion. "I've set a high expectation and when they hadn't met it, they had to make a professional decision if they wanted to be a member of this staff," Lombardi said. It becomes a kind of compact between the bad teacher and the principal: he won't give the "unsatisfactory" rating if they agree to take their act to some other school.

Lombardi has been able to survive through several regime changes in the city's school scene in large part because these schemes have paid off. In 2002 the school made it onto the list of the city's 200 most-improved schools. Test scores in math and reading shot through the roof at the 500-student school under Lombardi's leadership. Clearly as a result of his sidestepping the normal way of doing business, PS 49 students and teachers are better-off today. The school was even recognized by the New York State Education Department in 2004 for its success in narrowing the achievement gap between white and minority students, and it has received numerous other awards from business and civic groups for its success.

Another warrior is Mary Beth Minkley. In the mid-1990s she was a principal at Congress Elementary in Milwaukee. She, too, got used to hearing about all the things she wasn't allowed to do and got used to ignoring it. She managed to start the city's first year-round school, then battled bureaucrats who refused to fix the air-conditioning in the summer months. When she needed more space to accommodate the swelling student population of kids who suddenly wanted to be a part of her popular school, her bosses warned her to slow down. At a 1999 breakfast honoring her work in creating the year-round school, Minkley told the crowd: "I know there are people from the central office in the audience, but you made things extremely difficult for us when we were trying to make this happen." (Minkley retired from the Milwaukee Public Schools soon thereafter and became an administrator in the Racine, Wisconsin, Unified School District.)

Planting Seeds of Change

Despite the obvious successes of people like Lombardi and Minkley, the question remains: Are they the exceptions that prove the rule? Is there anything systemic about what is happening? Lombardi, through his careful consideration of which rules are worth following and which are worth avoiding, has effectively taken care of business for his school, but he admits that he has done so at the expense of the city's other schools, which have been forced to accept bad teachers who have been driven out of his building with "satisfactory" work evaluations in their files. “I made my school better, but I made your system even worse,” Lombardi told the city council’s education committee during 2003 hearings on the impact of contractual work rules on the running of good schools.

In fact, creating leaders like Lombardi and Minkley is what a number of people have turned their attention to. A growing number of entrepreneurial programs, like the legendary Johnny Appleseed, focus on planting seeds to produce school leaders who will someday lead transformations at the school level. The goal? An army of agents for change.

The Leadership Academy and Urban Network for Chicago (LAUNCH) is one such agent. A joint effort of the Chicago Public Schools, Northwestern University, and the union that represents principals in the Chicago schools, this program to train new school leaders was started in 1998. The program intended “to seize that opportunity by finding and training the best and brightest candidates,” according to Albert Bertini, an education professor at the University of Chicago at the time, “creating a critical mass of ‘change agents’ with the promise of transforming individual schools and—potentially—the entire system.”

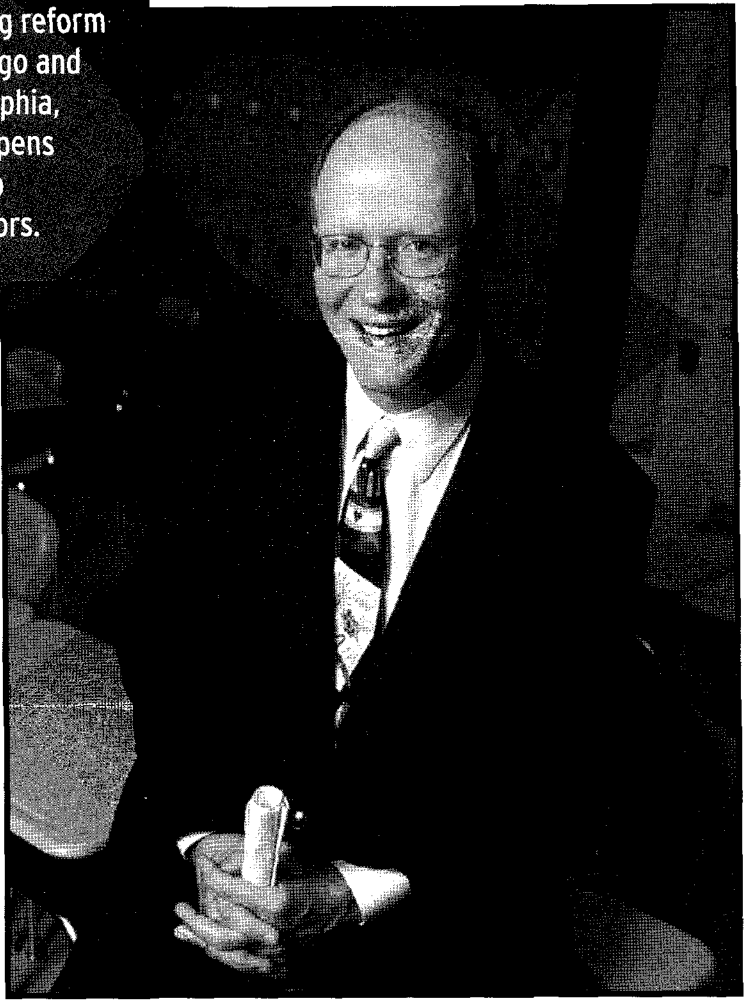
Aspiring principals in LAUNCH participate in hands-on lessons that emphasize leadership and management, in addition to education. Participants take summer courses at Northwestern’s Kellogg Business School and are then paired with a principal mentor for five months of intense professional development. The principals’ union participated in the creation and implementation of LAUNCH, essentially eliminating one potential internal obstacle.

To date, 100 LAUNCH fellows have become principals in the Chicago schools, and many others have assumed other leadership roles within schools and at the district office. Not wanting to put all of its eggs in one basket, the district also partners with the University of Illinois-Chicago and the nonprofit group New Leaders for New Schools to help find and train promising change-agent school leaders. Similar leadership programs have been run in districts like St. Paul, Minnesota; Columbus, Ohio; Norfolk, Virginia; and elsewhere.

As mentioned, seed-sowing programs such as these, because they are aligned with and sanctioned by the official school leadership, tend not to produce the kind of rule-breaking James Deans mentioned above. (Neither Lombardi nor Minkley graduated from a leadership academy.) The leadership programs tend to encourage their students to look for ways to do a better job of leading schools within the existing rules and framework. On a visit to training sessions conducted at New York’s Leadership Academy in 2004, I observed a session conducted by the education department’s legal division, instructing principals in how to build an airtight case against an incompetent teacher. The lawyers went over the common technical mistakes that often cause arbitrators to rule against management before they can discuss the substance of the charges. Essentially, these budding school leaders were being taught how to dot their Is and cross their Ts so that they can find effective ways to level the playing field with labor. One longtime administrator who was present for the session remarked to me: “The way it used to work, you were lucky if someone pulled you aside and talked to you about these issues. The labor contracts were something nobody felt comfortable bringing up at meetings and training sessions.”

Paul Vallas

Directing reform in Chicago and Philadelphia, Vallas opens doors to innovators.



PHOTOGRAPH / LISA GODFREY

The NCLB Effect

Of all the types of school entrepreneurs, the one least understood, perhaps, is that which could have the most impact: the NCLB opportunists. These secret entrepreneurs were silent until the 2001 federal No Child Left Behind act and other standards-based reform efforts opened a window of opportunity for them to use their creative and risk-taking skills. They have seized on the new accountability measures to turn around their own struggling schools. These old school entrepreneurs see sanctions for repeated failure as opportunities rather than punishment.

Another new approach is what some believe to be the emergence of "teacher partnerships," being pioneered in Minnesota and a few other places, in which teachers literally own charter schools and are ultimately accountable for learning. These teachers help select the staff, decide teaching methods and curriculum, evaluate their performance, and decide their compensation.

Similarly, the United Federation of Teachers, the union representing New York City teachers, took the unusually entrepreneurial step in 2005 of applying for and opening its own experimental charter school in an impoverished neighborhood in Brooklyn. The school operates without a principal (it uses a lead teacher), and teachers sit on the schools' board of directors. Union leaders have said they hope to show through increased student achievement that it is possible to run successful schools in the city within the confines of the teachers' contract.

> **The key question will be whether districts can reinvent themselves in ways that no longer require school leaders to break the rules or to put their own necks on the line to do what is best for their kids.**

Two things that entrepreneurial school leaders have in common is a desire to improve the delivery of education to students and the willingness to try every means imaginable to make it happen. They understand that empowering principals and teachers to be change-agents will create fundamental change in the culture of school systems, a culture that has historically stifled and even frowned on creativity and innovation.

A prominent example of a modern entrepreneurial catalyst is Philadelphia schools' CEO, Paul Vallas. He comes from a nontraditional background, he has little invested in preserving the way things have been done in the past, and his own professional background convinced him that radical change is not only necessary but will occur only with poking and prodding from multiple directions.

Vallas, who helped Mayor Richard Daley transform Chicago's schools, sent clear messages to entrepreneurial types when he took over in Philadelphia in 2002: your innovative spirit is welcome here, so let's talk. Business leaders, who for years sat on the sidelines because their efforts to assist the school systems were often squandered by ineffective school leaders and systems, suddenly found hope and became early partners in reform.

Vallas has engaged in internal tinkering and engineering in ways that are not unique, such as breaking up large campuses into smaller learning communities, virtually eliminating middle schools, and attempting to infuse schools with better technology that can be used in conjunction with the city's instructional programs. But he has also turned Philadelphia into a stomping ground for outside groups trying to push innovation. In that regard, his support from the highest levels of the school system has been unprecedented. Private companies, like Edison Schools, have found a welcome home under Vallas and are operating several schools in his district. The University of Pennsylvania and Temple and St. Joseph's universities also are now running schools for the system.

While such privatization schemes are often extremely controversial, Vallas has managed to win some degree of support from teachers and from the larger community. From day one he has unveiled a dizzying array of reforms, programs, and partnerships, creating the image that things are moving at lightning speed toward improvement. One teacher union leader went so far as to note, "I don't remember a superintendent ever being on a honeymoon for three years."

In addition, businesses that are peripheral to education have been brought onboard as well by Vallas's vision. The software giant Microsoft is building an experimental new high school in the district. The result is what Thomas Toch, a writer on education, calls "the early stages of a revolution in public education." Vallas, Toch noted, "has forced the Philadelphia education community to rethink the status quo and question the effectiveness for kids of a system built around rules and regulations designed to protect adults."

Can We Institutionalize the Incentive to Reform?

Entrepreneurs within the public school system clearly play a role in improving conditions for learning in the schools under their charge. In cases like Philadelphia's Vallas, their efforts have the potential to go a long way toward transforming entire systems. It is still not clear whether it is possible for entrepreneurship alone, however, to change the overall culture of public-sector school systems, which are as a rule disdainful of innovation and imagination even in the face of obvious failure.

Entrepreneurial educators face common obstacles in their efforts to improve education: institutional resistance from forces within the system, the bureaucrats, labor unions, education schools, and the state's tight control over entry to the teaching profession. In fact, there is strong evidence that public-sector school systems themselves are their own most formidable barriers to more entrepreneurial thinking and leadership. Thomas Edison, it could reasonably be argued, would never have been able to invent the lightbulb had educrats been breathing down his neck all day. As Bill Andrekopoulos, who is now superintendent in Milwaukee, puts it, "Creativity and problem solving disappear in a bureaucratic structure."

Policymakers who wish to unleash more entrepreneurial energy in struggling school systems should consider an approach that makes risk taking more glamorous and rewarding than is currently the case. Pay scales for teachers and principals currently leave little room for incentives that reward risk taking to find better ways to educate children.

As more districts seek ways to attract alternatively certified teachers and administrators, careful consideration should be given to the aspects of plans that provide meaningful training and continuing support for educators coming from other sectors to work in schools. And given the pressure of No Child Left Behind, policymakers should also continue to consider actions that encourage educators to take advantage of the accountability measures in the law to reform their schools. The current climate of ferment has the potential to unleash an unprecedented wave of entrepreneurship from school principals and teachers who wish to be part of the solution rather than the problem. The key question will be whether districts can reinvent themselves in ways that no longer require school leaders to break the rules or to put their own necks on the line to do what is best for their kids. Soon, perhaps even rule followers will be capable of running great schools.

Joe Williams, a former staff writer on education for the New York Daily News, *is a nonresident senior fellow with Education Sector and author of* Cheating Our Kids: How Politics and Greed Ruin Education.

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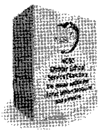

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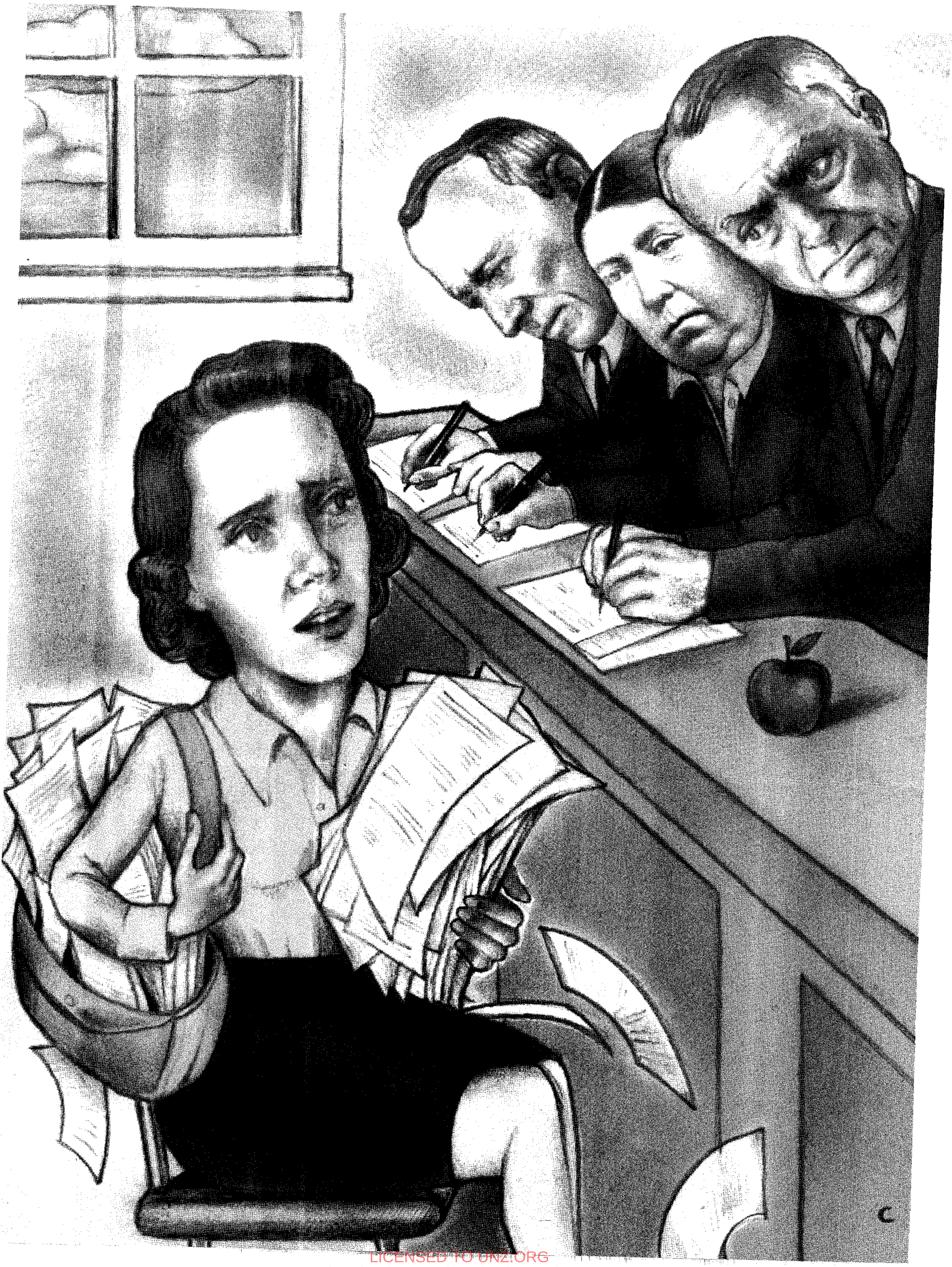

great EXPECTATIONS

The Impact of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards

BY WILLIAM LOWE BOYD AND JILLIAN P. REESE

As the largest and most highly publicized initiative to improve teaching in American schools, the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) has raised great expectations. It has created rigorous standards for teaching and a system to assess and certify teachers meeting these standards; it has promoted financial incentives to reward National Board-certified teachers (NBCTs) and pushed for their use to leverage improvement in education. In its 18 years of existence, with nearly $400 million in support from government, corporate, and foundation grants, plus candidate fees, the NBPTS has certified more than 40,200 teachers (see Figure 1), about 1 percent of the U.S. teaching force. In the urgency of today's ethos of accountability and "No Child Left Behind," what has been the impact of this high-profile venture on improving American public education? Has it made its effects felt beyond the 1 percent of board-certified teachers? Is it the most cost-effective way to improve teaching? And is it raising the standards and performance of the teaching profession and the achievement of students? Or is it, as some critics have argued, a costly and largely misguided and ineffective effort to improve teaching and student achievement?

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The fee for certification by the National Board is $2,300. "A candidate's efforts to achieve National Board Certification will likely take the better part of a school year and involve a total of 200–400 hours of work." Certification must be renewed after ten years.

The answers to these important policy questions are strongly disputed by both supporters and critics of the NBPTS. Considering the opportunity costs of the millions of dollars spent on the NBPTS and with research documenting that the quality of teaching is the most important within-school variable determining student success, the stakes involved could hardly be higher. In this article, we consider these questions in light of published material and research on the NBPTS and telephone interviews we conducted with prominent stakeholders, leaders of the NBPTS, and policy analysts and researchers holding varied views, pro and con, on the topic.

History, Purpose, and Approach of the NBPTS

The idea for the National Board, first articulated in a speech in 1985 by American Federation of Teachers president Albert Shanker, was a centerpiece of the 1986 report of the Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy's Task Force on Teaching as a Profession, titled "A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century." The report called for the creation of a national board for professional teaching standards "to establish high standards for what teachers need to know and should be able to do, and to certify teachers who meet that standard"; to restructure schools "while holding them accountable for student progress"; to "restructure the teaching force, and introduce a new category of Lead Teachers …"; and to "relate incentives for teachers to school-wide student performance."

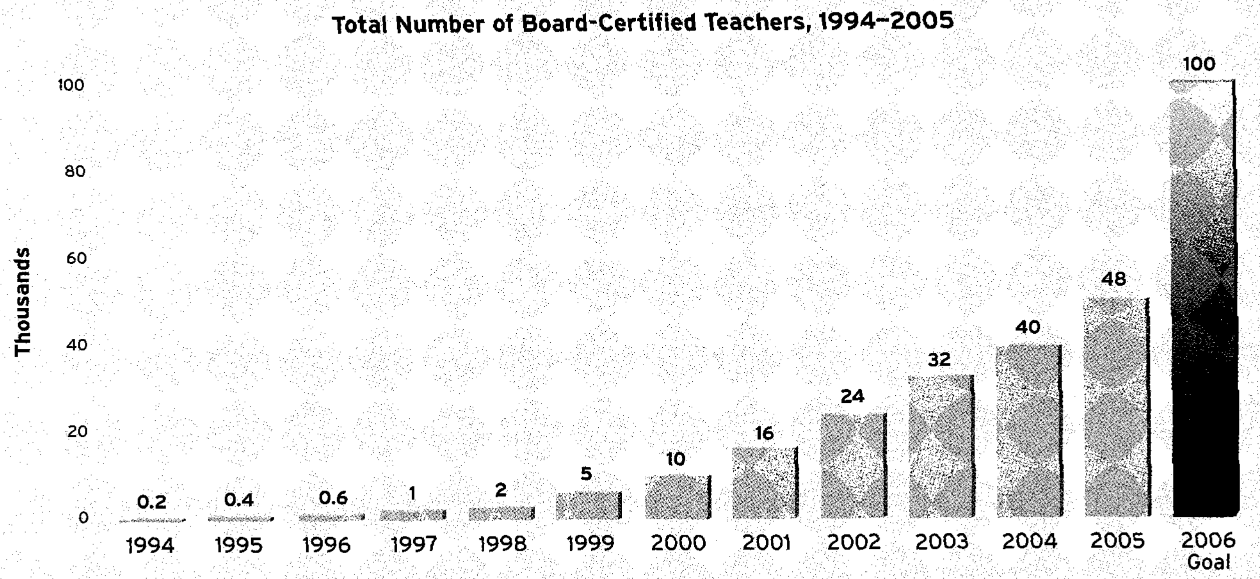
Launched in 1987, the NBPTS describes itself as "an independent, nonprofit, nonpartisan, and nongovernmental organization" whose "mission is to advance the quality of teaching and learning by maintaining high and rigorous standards for what accomplished teachers should know and be able to do, providing a national voluntary system certifying teachers who meet these standards, and advocating related education reforms to integrate National Board Certification in American education and to capitalize on the expertise of National Board Certified Teachers."

At the outset, the founders of the NBPTS had no idea how time-consuming and expensive the pursuit of its goals would be. It took six years of debate, planning, and development of the standards and assessment process before the first group of teachers was certified by the National Board. While the board originally thought its plan might cost around $50 million, few anticipated how much developing its standards and certification process and campaigning for its acceptance and adoption across the nation would ultimately cost. Total costs to date are about $400 million.

All the standards are based on the five core propositions of the NBPTS: 1) teachers are committed to students and their learning; 2) teachers know the subjects they teach and how to teach those subjects to students; 3) teachers are responsible for managing and monitoring students' learning; 4) teachers think systematically about their practice and learn from experience; and 5) teachers are members of learning communities. National Board assessments consist of two main parts: portfolio entries and assessment center exercises. Specific entries and exercises vary among content areas (at first just 2, but now 27), but the major parts are consistent. The portfolios consist of videotapes, student products, teaching artifacts, and candidate analyses of their teaching practice. Assess-

Revised Progress (Figure 1)

Though the National Board is certifying teachers at an increasing rate, the total number of certified teachers is likely to fall well short of the board's 2006 goal of 100,000, which would equal about 3 percent of all public school teachers.



SOURCE: National Board for Professional Teaching Standards

ments reflect specific knowledge of content areas and are meant to validate the content of the portfolios.

The fee for certification by the National Board is $2,300. According to the board, "A candidate's efforts to achieve National Board Certification will likely take the better part of a school year and involve a total of 200–400 hours of work." Certification must be renewed after ten years. One of the National Board's accomplishments has been maintaining a high and rigorous standard for certification. Only about 50 percent of candidates are successful in their first effort at certification; this has helped the credibility of the venture with business and political leaders by demonstrating that not everyone meets the board's high standards. At the same time, the cost-effectiveness of the board's approach, its focus on what teachers should know and be able to do rather than on the student outcomes or achievement associated with teaching, and its methods of assessing teacher quality, are features that have attracted strong criticism—issues we will return to later in this article.

Whatever the criticisms of the NBPTS, its accomplishments are impressive considering the odds against the effort when it began in 1987. Efforts to create rigorous standards for teachers, to evaluate them against such standards, and to offer differential or "merit pay" fly against the egalitarian ethos of the teaching profession. Such initiatives have always faced strong resistance from teacher unions. Further complicating matters, the two national unions, the National Education Association (NEA) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), were very much at odds at the time. Moreover, before the development of the NBPTS, there had been no demand from policymakers or the public for the creation of a cadre of master teachers. As Jane Hannaway and Kendra Bischoff of the Urban Institute have written, the NBPTS "had significant hurdles to clear—both on the supply and demand side. The organization had no certification process, nor was there an existing research basis for assessment. In addition, it was unclear why teachers would opt for this special certification given the prevalence of the single salary schedule."

How did the NBPTS overcome these obstacles? In a nutshell, it gained extraordinary support from foundation and government leaders through a powerful combination of astute leadership, political savvy, skillful lobbying, and an organizational structure and process that gained legitimacy with educators by giving a majority of the places on the National Board to teachers—two-thirds of the 63 seats on the board, in fact. This led to long-standing criticisms that the board is controlled by the teacher unions, but it is another example of the political savvy of its founders.

As the early leaders of the board sought to reach teachers, they also sought to build the board's legitimacy among state and federal policymakers as well as business and foundation leaders. Among those working to build support were AFT president Al Shanker, a key force behind the idea from the earliest days, and Mary Futrell of the NEA. Along with this key union leadership, indispensable and remarkably effective leadership came from North Carolina governor Jim Hunt, chair of the board of directors for the first ten years, and James Kelly, president of the board for its first 12 years and a veteran of years of work in education and social policy for the Ford Foundation. Hunt and Kelly were ideal for their roles because of their prominence and wide acceptance as leaders in their respective arenas of politics and foundations. Both were well liked, effective in bipartisan efforts, and extraordinarily well wired into national networks of influence.

As part of the effort to cultivate acceptance of the National Board, Kelly told us that not only was the board composed of a wide array of "blue ribbon" representatives, in an effort to "get all the players to the table," but also board members were allowed to bring guests to the meetings. Further, Kelly and Hunt traveled together and met with many key business and political leaders across the country. After the NBPTS began certifying teachers, outstanding board-certified teachers were often invited to meetings with governors to discuss why they had sought certification and what they thought about it. The enthusiasm, commitment, and testimonies of these teachers often helped governors see the value of supporting the NBPTS effort with incentives for teachers. Eventually, a nonpartisan policy environment at the state level was established in support of teachers certified by the NBPTS. All 50 states now offer regulatory or legislative support for National Board certification, and a number of states and more than five hundred school districts offer financial incentives. According to the NBPTS, these incentives range from grants to cover the $2,300 certification fee to a $6,000 salary increase in South Carolina and a 12 percent salary bump in North Carolina.

Assessing the Effectiveness of the NBPTS

The NBPTS can be evaluated in terms of its effects on institutional change, student achievement, and cost-effectiveness. On the institutional front, the development of national standards for teaching has clearly had a significant effect on the teaching profession in the United States. As several experts told us, the NBPTS has "changed the conversation" about teaching, within the profession if not outside it. As K–12 students are increasingly held to higher standards, the same is becoming true for teachers. But critics wonder what the NBPTS standards really tell us about the quality of teachers where it counts most: their impact on students and student achievement. Advocates of the National Board refer to the rigor of the standards as well as the process of certification to support their claims that National Board–certified teachers will improve the quality of teaching.

As evidence of the NBPTS's impact on the profession, David Imig, the former president of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, notes how the standards have affected the design of many teacher-preparation programs. For instance, many master's candidates expect their program to provide some preparation toward National Board certification. Further, the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) now requires that teacher-preparation programs show the influence of NBPTS standards as a condition for accreditation. For example, education schools must provide evidence that their graduates can teach successfully.

As part of the way the NBPTS has "changed the conversation" about teaching, it has gained increasing acceptance in the education profession (including the national teachers' associations) for performance assessment and for differential certification and pay for outstanding teachers. Even getting the door opened partway on these controversial items has been an accomplishment. Through its growing cadre of NBCTs, moreover, the board is potentially in a position to foster and aid real education reform through the expertise and leadership potential of the NBCTs as mentors, coaches, and school leaders.

At the same time, serious questions remain about the effects of NBCTs on student achievement and about the cost-effectiveness of the NBPTS's approach to improving the standard of teaching. Certification remains quite expensive in both time and fees, and NBCTs still compose only 1 percent of the U.S. teaching force. In recent years, some state policymakers have begun to question their state's ability to continue to pay the financial incentives created to encourage teachers to undergo the arduous board-certification process.

Beyond cost-effectiveness, however, a number of critics continue to regard the NBPTS as misguided and question the value of the whole enterprise. In his book, *Common Sense School Reform* (2004), Frederick Hess says, "In theory, [the NBPTS] is an interesting idea," but "in execution, it is a disaster." He sums up his criticisms as follows:

> The NBPTS approach undermines commonsense efforts to link teacher compensation or recognition to their effectiveness as a classroom teacher, faculty colleague, and member of the school community. Instead, it has constructed an exhausting, expensive process that wastes time and money while suggesting that the measure of teacher quality is not whether students learn but whether teachers write sufficiently passionate essays about their "commitment" and "reflectiveness."

Similarly, in a 1999 *National Review* article, Danielle Dunne Wilcox and Chester Finn wrote, "After a dozen years of R&D and the investment of $120 million, [the NBPTS] cannot demonstrate that its blue-ribbon winners actually produce higher-achieving students. Worse, the board actually rewards teachers for being good at the opposite of what most parents think teachers should excel at. Its idea of a great teacher is one who embraces 'constructivist' pedagogy, 'discovery' learning, and cultural relativism—not one who imparts to students fundamental knowledge or even has it himself." Thus, as some of our interviewees agreed, "The NBPTS is focused on inputs rather than outputs. It is all about the quality of the teacher and not about the impact the teacher has on students."

A lack of research evidence about the effects of NBCTs on students made the National Board especially vulnerable to criticism. This was highlighted in the fracas that occurred in 2002 when one of the critics, J. E. Stone, of East Tennessee State University, released a seven-page report, "The Value-Added Achievement Gains of NBPTS-Certified Teachers in Tennessee." Stone found that none of the 16 board-certified teachers in Tennessee who taught grades 3–8 (the only grades for which value-added scores were available) met a standard for exceptional teaching set by an incentive program in Chattanooga. Stone concluded that his results "present a serious challenge to NBPTS's claims" and that "they suggest that public expenditures on NBPTS certification be suspended."

In a "Goliath takes on David" scenario, this tiny report by a single professor prompted no less than the Education Commission of the States to empanel four independent experts to review the validity of Stone's research. The panel acknowledged that Stone had addressed an important policy question and that the absence of studies of this type was due in part to "the Board's own approach in identifying excellent teachers—examining practices rather than the learning of their students," but concluded that Stone's study was badly flawed (primarily because his sample of 16 teachers was too small to enable generalizations) and his claims were therefore completely unsupported.

This did not slow down Stone, who, in a recent paper with George Cunningham, claimed, "NB teachers don't come close to producing the learning gains produced by teachers who have been identified as highly effective by means of a value-added assessment." In this paper, Cunningham and Stone assert that a "good value-added assessment is more likely to accurately identify teachers who really pack a punch than the less accurate, more expensive process used to identify and certify National Board teachers."

The idea of measuring and certifying teacher quality by student performance is being pursued by a recent alternative to the NBPTS, the American Board for Certification of Teacher Excellence (ABCTE), which was founded in 2001.

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The ABCTE says that its proposed master-teacher certification "not only tests candidates in subject area knowledge, requiring them to perform at the distinguished level, but also requires teachers to demonstrate classroom effectiveness over time, as determined by a longitudinal study of student academic achievement. This link between classroom experience and student achievement distinguishes American Board certification from other master teacher programs—the students, not the process, are the central focus." The ABCTE's program will be less expensive and time-consuming than the NBPTS process, but it is also less recognized by states and school districts, in large part because it is not yet operating, due to trouble developing a practical measure of the effects of teachers on student achievement.

The NBPTS has endeavored to answer its critics by commissioning 22 independent studies. These research awards, funded by the U.S. Department of Education and private donors, were based on an independent review process designed and managed by the RAND Corporation. Three studies completed in 2004 showed a positive correlation between board-certified teachers and student success. The first and most rigorous of the studies, by Dan Goldhaber and Emily Anthony of the Urban Institute, found that on average North Carolina students in grades 3–5 whose teachers were board certified scored 7 to 15 percent higher on tests than students whose teachers attempted but failed to gain certification. The effect sizes were an average of 3 percent of a standard deviation, with larger effects for young and low-income students. North Carolina has an accountability system that enabled the researchers to link more than 600,000 student records in reading and math to individual teachers over a three-year period, providing pre-test and post-test scores. This study thus examined student gains and controlled for both observed and unobserved differences in the types of students included. The other two studies, in Arizona and in Miami, reached conclusions similar to Goldhaber and Anthony's.

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Critics draw attention to other, less positive findings of the Goldhaber and Anthony study. Goldhaber and Anthony found that NBCTs were more effective than teachers who failed to achieve certificates. They did not become more effective as a result of the application process, which is what the NBPTS suggests. It is unclear how simply identifying more effective teachers will improve teaching. Also, NBCTs were actually less effective in the year they applied for the program, perhaps because of the burdens of the application process. Finally, all the reported differences between NBCTs and non-certified teachers are relatively small, especially given the program's cost. Thus, for critics, these findings do not make the NBPTS a resounding success.

Critics continue to question the National Board's cost-effectiveness and its ability to identify better teachers. They wonder if the board's process is making anyone better, or if certification is simply a "gold star" given to the best teachers. In response to the latter criticisms, the NBPTS points to letters it receives from candidates for certification saying that the board's certification process is the best and most valuable professional development they have ever experienced.

Conclusions

Clearly, criticism and skepticism about the board continue to exist. But it is also clear that the NBPTS has changed the conversation about teaching within the profession by setting and gaining acceptance of its high standards and by persuading teachers and their unions to begin to accept performance evaluation and differential certification and pay for teachers. Considering how hard it is to change the character and momentum of an institution and a profession, this is no small accomplishment. But one of the issues the NBPTS is struggling with is getting the board-certified teachers into the schools that need them the most. Several studies have shown the positive impact of board-certified teachers on low-income and minority students, but several other studies have found that a disproportionate number of these teachers are in high-performing schools serving advantaged students, not where they seem to be needed most (see Figure 2).

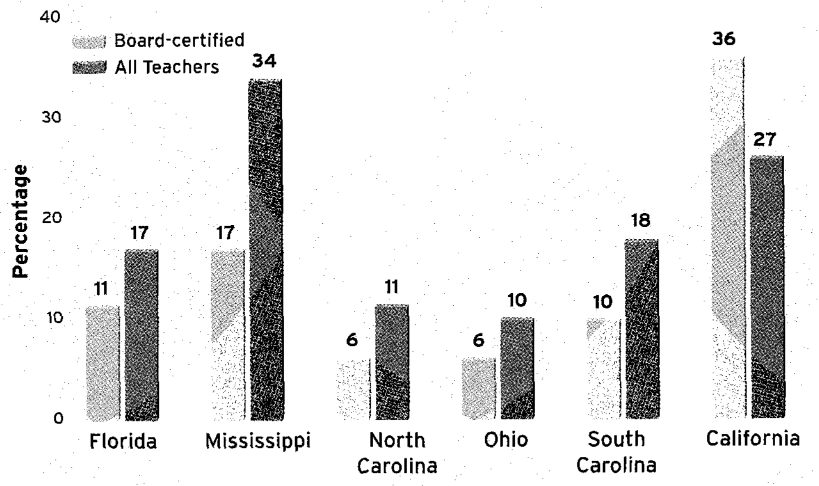
A major remaining bone of contention is the cost-effectiveness issue surrounding the NBPTS. To complaints about the costs for developing and campaigning for the acceptance of the NBPTS, Jim Kelly replies that the "total, one-time capital costs should be [viewed] in the context of annual expenditures on public education in the U.S. of about $400 billion dollars during the period of NBPTS development. Thus, the proper public finance perspective is to ask, Is the creation of this system justified at a total one-time investment of [approximately] $200 million, about half of which was privately financed, during a period when total public expenditures on public education were something on the order of

$6 trillion?" About cost-effectiveness, Kelly adds that salary incentives for board-certified teachers should be compared with public education's notoriously weak and sometimes perverse incentives, which actually reward teachers for getting out of teaching and becoming administrators.

Help Where It's Needed? (Figure 2)

Except in California, board-certified teachers are less likely than other teachers to be working in schools where the poverty rate is high.

Board-Certified Teachers Who Work in High-Poverty Schools, 2004



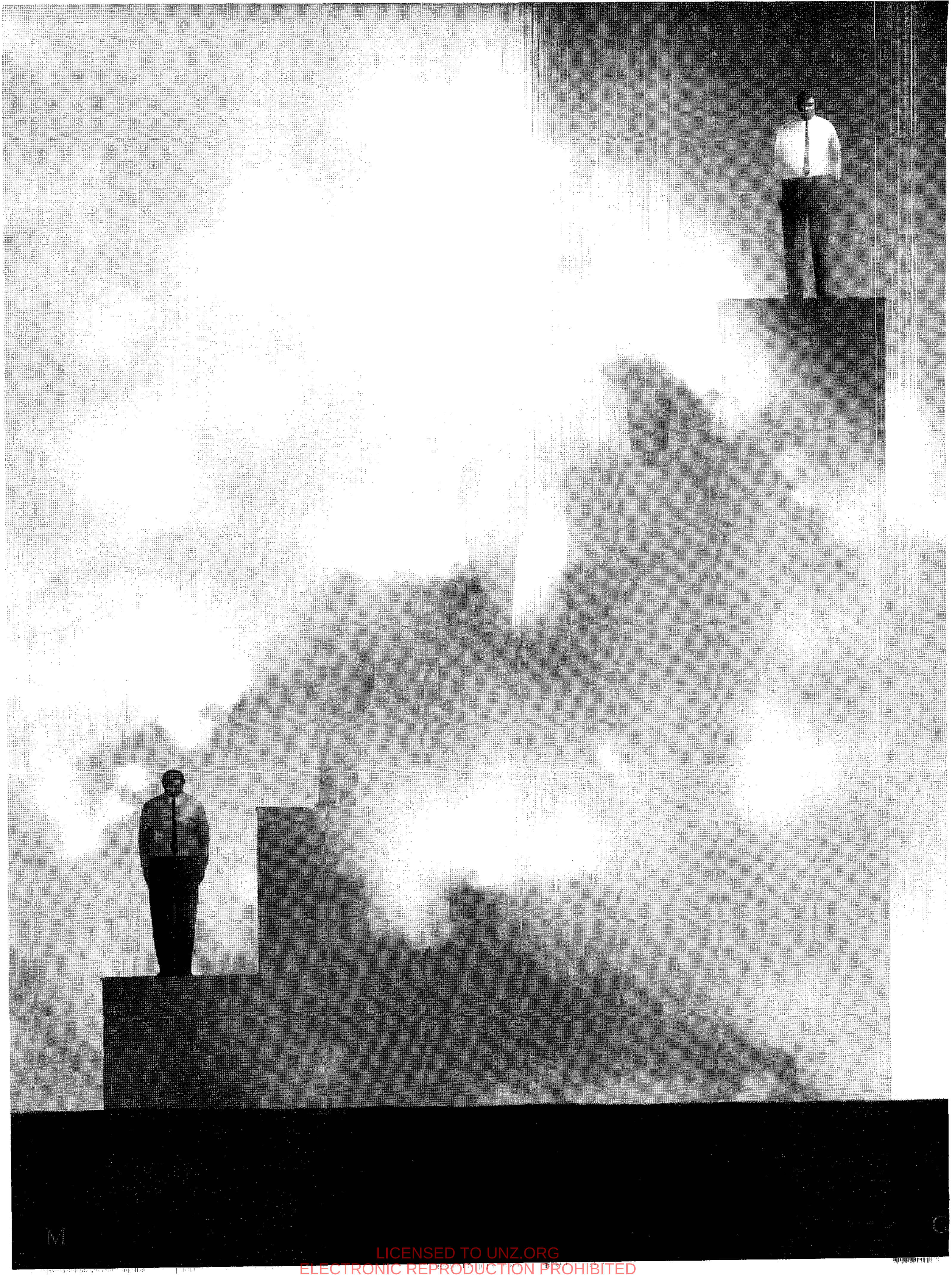
SOURCE: D. C. Humphrey, J. E. Koppich, and H. J. Hough, "Sharing the Wealth: National Board-Certified Teachers and the Students Who Need Them Most," *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, March 3, 2005

Nevertheless, critics continue to question the NBPTS's method and focus for measuring quality teaching and to call instead for what they believe should be simple and direct measures of effects on student achievement. The idea is attractive, but in a penetrating discussion of quality teaching, in the January 2005 issue of the *Teachers College Record*, Gary Fenstermacher and Virginia Richardson of the University of Michigan make clear that appraising teaching is not a simple matter. They differentiate between the task of teaching and the student achievement that one hopes will (but does not always) occur. Any adequate appraisal of teaching must consider both the teaching itself and the learning that results from it. Attention to just one or the other is inadequate and incomplete. National Board certification, in fact, requires that teachers gather and present evidence of their students' learning as well as evidence of their teaching. However, critics, such as Dale Ballou of Vanderbilt University, raise doubts about the adequacy and validity of this process.

While it seems obvious that quality teaching requires strength in both knowledge of content and pedagogical techniques, getting the balance right between these components remains controversial. Except where individuals are self-taught, learning is a jointly produced outcome, involving effort by both a teacher and a learner. The pedagogical techniques help engage and communicate to the learner. Fenstermacher and Richardson stress: "We all know that learners are not passive receptors of information directed at them. Learning does not arise solely on the basis of teacher activity ... [I]t follows that success at learning requires a combination of circumstances well beyond the actions of a teacher." Consequently, they conclude, it makes sense to appraise the dimensions of both the task and the achievement of teaching. If there is no recognition of this difference, then it is hard to recognize some of the NBPTS's important virtues and easy to be impatient with it.

As we have reflected about the impact of the NBPTS and its board-certified teachers, who still constitute only 1 percent of all teachers, it seems that the National Board and education reformers need to give far more attention to trying to increase the cost-effectiveness and the multiplier effects of board-certified teachers as leaders and exemplars. Greater emphasis and attention—by the board, by schools and school districts, and by reformers—to structuring, encouraging, and supporting the leadership roles that NBCTs can and should play could maximize the influence of these teachers as coaches, mentors, and leaders for other teachers. Research is only now emerging that explores the social and productive consequences for schools of introducing the status differences associated with NBCTs into the egalitarian ethos of public school teaching. For NBCTs to affect the greater populace of teachers and students, their expertise must be shared, which is not easily accomplished in the typical milieu of schools, where teachers usually work as isolated solo practitioners. Given the increasing emphasis being placed on shared or distributed leadership within schools, the potential of sharing the expertise of NBCTs is especially significant and important for efforts to reform education, for the teaching profession, and for education leadership.

William Lowe Boyd is editor of the American Journal of Education *and professor of educational leadership at Pennsylvania State University. Jillian P. Reese is an editorial assistant with the* American Journal of Education *and a doctoral student at Pennsylvania State University.*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When Principals Rate Teachers

The best – and the worst – stand out

Elementary- and secondary-school teachers in the United States traditionally have been compensated according to salary schedules based solely on experience and education. Concerned that this system makes it difficult to retain talented teachers and provides few incentives for them to work to raise student achievement while in the classroom, many policymakers have proposed merit-pay programs that link teachers' salaries directly to their apparent impact on student achievement.

Until recently, only a handful of isolated districts had attempted such programs. Now entire state systems are moving toward merit pay, with new policies established recently in Florida and Texas requiring districts to set teachers' salaries based in part on the gains their students are making on the state's accountability exam.

Implementing a merit-pay system, however, comes with challenges. Students often have more than one teacher but take only one high-stakes test. How do we know which teacher to reward? If students

ILLUSTRATION / MICHAEL GIBBS

BY BRIAN JACOB AND LARS LEFGREN

are not tested annually in each subject, how do we determine the merit of a teacher in a year without testing? How do we fairly assess the impact of a teacher during a testing year if we do not know how students performed during the previous school year? Can a merit-pay system overcome these obstacles?

One option is to turn to principals and ask them to help determine the size of pay raises. Such subjective performance assessments are already used to evaluate untenured teachers, and they play a large role in promotion and compensation decisions in other occupations. While principals can and do judge teachers' performance, however, there is little good evidence on the accuracy of their judgments.

The research reported in this paper fills this gap. We found that principals in a western school district did a good job of assessing teachers' effectiveness. In fact, principals are quite good at identifying those teachers who produce the largest and smallest standardized achievement gains in their schools (the top and bottom 10–20 percent). They are less able to distinguish among teachers in the middle of this distribution (the middle 60–80 percent), suggesting that merit-pay programs that reward or sanction teachers should be based on evaluations by principals and should be focused on the highest- and lowest-performing teachers.

A Representative Sample

We surveyed all 13 elementary-school principals in a mid-sized school district, that asked to remain anonymous, in the western United States. We asked them to rate the teachers in their schools on a variety of performance dimensions. The survey, conducted in February 2003, provides evaluations by their principals of 202 elementary-school teachers in grades 2 through 6.

The teachers included in the study are fairly representative of elementary-school teachers nationwide. Sixteen percent of them are men, the average age is 42, and average teaching experience is 12 years. Most of these teachers attended a local university; 10 percent attended another in-state college; and 6 percent attended a school out of state. Seventeen percent of them have a master's degree or higher, and most are licensed in either early childhood education or elementary education. Finally, 8 percent of the teachers in our sample taught in a mixed-grade classroom in 2002–03, and 5 percent were in a "split" classroom, sharing a single contract and dividing the school day with another teacher. The students in grades 2 through 6 in the district are predominantly white (73 percent), with a sizable ethnic minority (Latino students compose 21 percent of the elementary population); 48 percent of them receive a free or reduced-price lunch. Achievement levels in the district are almost exactly at the average of the nation (49th percentile on the Stanford Achievement Test).

All elementary-school students in the district take a set of exams each year, in reading and math. These multiple-choice, criterion-referenced tests cover topics that are closely linked to the district's learning objectives. While student achievement results have not been linked to rewards or sanctions for schools until recently, the results of the exams have been distributed to parents annually for at least the past decade, years before implementation of the No Child Left Behind law. This latter fact is important because our study relies on a consistent data set covering the years 1998 through 2003. The district has not had a merit-pay program for teachers at any time during this period.

To ensure that we could link student achievement data to the appropriate teacher, we limited our sample to classroom teachers, omitting music and gym teachers as well as librarians. We excluded kindergarten and first-grade teachers because earlier achievement exams were not available for their students; this prevented us from developing a "value-added" measure of student learning. We retain in our analysis the small number of teachers who share a contract, each teaching only half of the school day. For our analysis, the gains made by students in these classes count toward the estimated value added of each of the two teachers.

Can Principals Identify Effective Teachers?

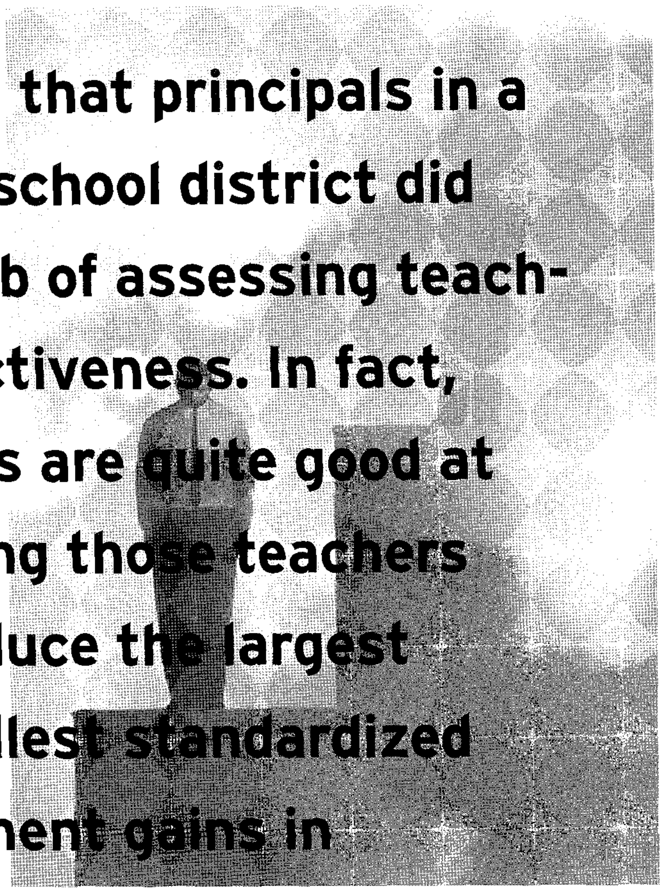
Principals were asked not only to provide a rating of overall teacher effectiveness, but also to assess, on a scale from one (inadequate) to ten (exceptional), specific teacher characteristics (ten altogether), including dedication and work ethic, classroom management, parent satisfaction, positive relationship with administrators, and ability to improve math and reading achievement. Principals were assured that their responses would be completely confidential and would not be revealed to the teachers or to any other employee of the school district.

While there was some variation among principals, the overall assessments they gave teachers were generally quite high, with an average of 8.1. Only 10 percent of the assessments fell below a 6, and the average rating for the least-generous principal was still a 6.7. At the same time, principals did not simply assign similar scores to each of their teachers. In fact, the principals generally used 5 to 6 different ratings for the teachers in their school.

Because principals differ in the generosity and degree of variation in the ratings they give, we placed all the ratings on the same scale by subtracting from each teacher's rating the average rating given by that teacher's principal and then dividing by the principal's standard deviation. We did this separately for each specific aspect of teacher performance about which principals were asked.

We compared a principal's assessment of how effective a teacher is at raising student reading or math achievement, one of the specific items principals were asked about, with that teacher's actual ability to do so as measured by their value added, the difference in student achievement that we can attribute to the teacher. To estimate the value added by a teacher, we examine the performance of her students after accounting for a wide variety of student and classroom characteristics that could affect achievement independent of the teacher's ability. These characteristics include race, gender, eligibility for the federal lunch program, limited English proficiency, and, most important, previous student achievement. We also take advantage of the availability of data on the same teachers from as far back as the 1996–97 school year; this enables us to distinguish long-term teacher quality from the possibly idiosyncratic performance of a class in any one year.

We find a positive correlation between a principal's assessment of how effective a teacher is at raising student achievement and that teacher's success in doing so as measured by the value-added approach: 0.32 for reading and 0.36 for math. These correlations are based not on a principal's overall rating of the teacher, but rather on the principal's personal assessment of how effective the teacher is at "raising student math (or reading) achievement." Previous studies of evaluations by principals have used only the overall rating of the teacher, a less direct assessment of a teacher's ability to raise student performance. Using the overall rating in that way could compromise the accuracy of subjective performance evaluations, especially if principals value characteristics of teachers that are unrelated to their effect on student performance. Our findings lead us to conclude that principals are able to identify accurately this dimension of teacher effectiveness.



We found that principals in a western school district did a good job of assessing teachers' effectiveness. In fact, principals are quite good at identifying those teachers who produce the largest and smallest standardized achievement gains in their schools.

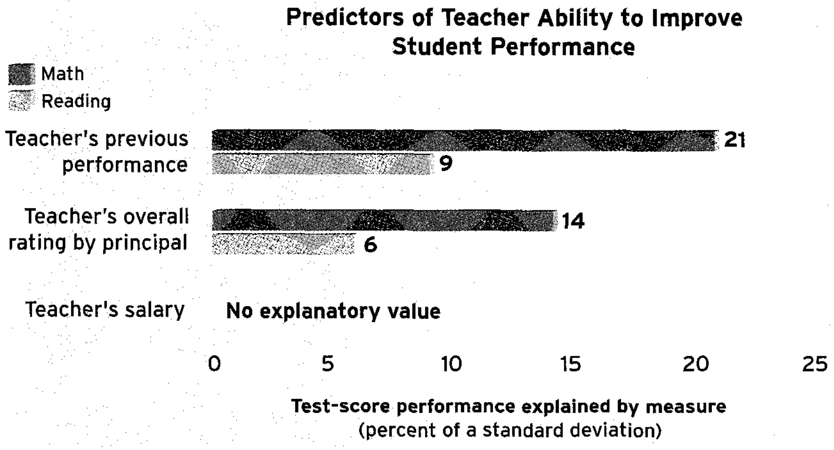
Why aren't these correlations even higher? One possible explanation is that principals focus on the average test scores in a teacher's classroom rather than on student *improvement*. There is some evidence for this conjecture. The correlation between ratings by principals and the average test scores of a teacher's students is significantly higher than the correlation between ratings by principals and the teacher's value-added rating in reading (0.56 versus 0.32), though not in math.

Another reason could be that principals focus on their most recent observations of teachers. We do find, for example, that the average achievement gains in a teacher's classroom in 2002–03 is a modestly stronger predictor of the principal's rating than the gains in any previous year. In theory, it is possible that principals are correct in assuming that a teacher's effectiveness changes over time so that teachers' most recent experience is the best indicator of their actual effectiveness. If that were the case, however, we would expect to find that principals' ratings are more highly correlated with value-added measures that have been adjusted to account for the fact that teachers tend to be less effective in their first one or two years in the classroom. In fact, the correlation between principals' ratings and experience-adjusted value-added measures is no higher than the correlation with our baseline value-added measures. The bigger mistake principals make, it seems, is not adequately accounting for students' incoming ability.

While informative about principals' overall abilities, a simple correlation does not tell us whether principals are more or less effective at identifying teachers at certain points on the ability distribution. We therefore estimated the percentage of teachers that a principal can correctly identify in the top group within his or her school. We found that the teachers identified by principals as being in the top category were, in fact, in the top category according to the value-added measures about 52 percent of the time in reading and 69 percent of the time in mathematics. If principals randomly assigned ratings to teachers, we would expect the corresponding probabilities to be 14 and 26 percent, respectively. This suggests that principals have considerable ability to identify teachers in the top of the distribution. The results are similar if one examines principals' ability to identify teachers in the bottom of the ability distribution.

Principal Distinctions (Figure 1)

Principals do a reasonably good job of identifying those teachers who are better (and worse) at raising student test scores. Not surprisingly, the best way to predict how effective a teacher will be is to find out how effective the teacher has been in the past. Differences in teachers' salaries within a school system are entirely unrelated to teachers' effectiveness.



Note: The figure shows the degree to which an increase of one standard deviation in each variable is related to student achievement in 2003. Previous performance is measured by the teacher's estimated success in raising test scores between 1998 and 2002. The analysis controls for student demographic characteristics, classroom characteristics, fixed effects for grade and school, and lagged math and reading scores. All reported effects are significant at the 0.05 level.

SOURCE: Authors' calculations from district's data

Despite their success with the top and bottom of the distribution, principals are significantly less successful at distinguishing among teachers in the middle of the ability distribution. Principals correctly identify only 49 percent of teachers as being better than the median teacher in their school in boosting students' reading scores, relative to the 33 percent that one would expect if principals' ratings were randomly assigned. Principals appear somewhat better at distinguishing between teachers in the middle of the distribution in math (they correctly placed 54 percent of teachers above the median, compared with the 26 percent expected if ratings were random), but they again appear to be better at identifying the best and worst teachers.

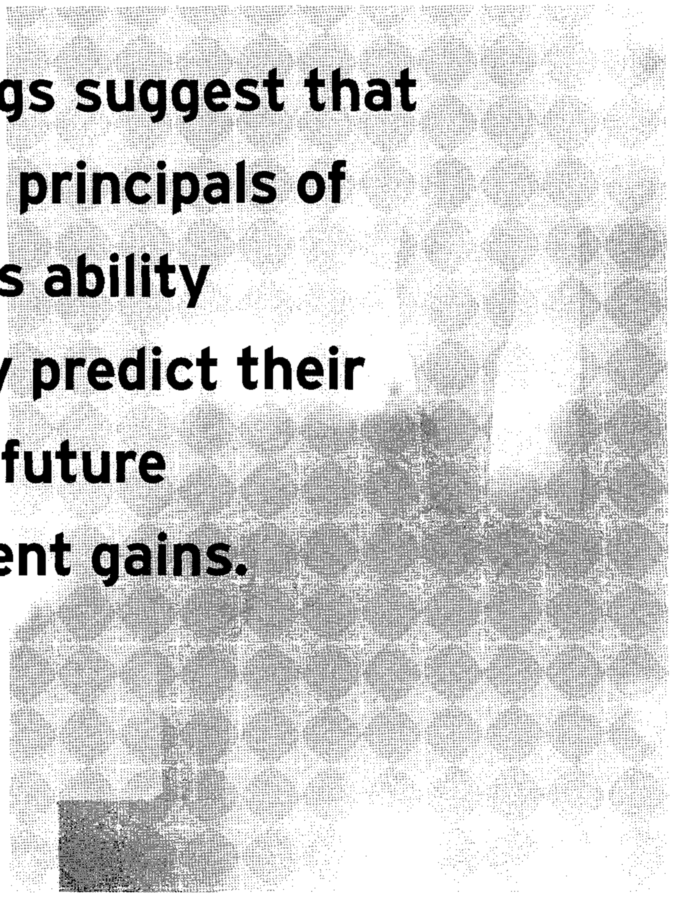
One reason that principals might have difficulty distinguishing between teachers in the middle is that the distribution of teachers' value-added ratings is highly compressed. However, our analysis of the data suggests that this is not the case. Teachers who receive ratings at or close to the median in the school have estimated value-added measures that are quite widely dispersed.

What Characteristics of Teachers Do Principals Value?

Of course, the effects of moving to a system of compensation based on assessment by principals depend on the relative importance they place on a teacher's ability to raise standardized test scores when making overall assessments of teachers' effectiveness. While such preferences could theoretically be set by district administrators or other policymakers, it is likely that principals would retain some autonomy over personnel decisions, so their preferences are important to investigate. We therefore compared principals' overall rating of each teacher with their assessment of various teacher attributes to examine how principals value different dimensions of quality in teachers.

Perhaps not surprisingly, teachers' ratings on many (though not all) of the individual survey items are highly correlated. Based on the relationships between the questions, we created three groups of teachers' quality characteristics and reanalyzed the results. The first group captures what might be described as traditional teaching ability and includes the ratings of classroom management, organization, and ability to improve students' test scores. The second, including the principal's assessments of a teacher's relationship with colleagues and administrators, measures a teacher's collegiality. The third measures student satisfaction and includes the principal's ratings of student satisfaction and the teacher as a role model.

Ability, collegiality, and student satisfaction all contribute independently to a principal's overall evaluation of a teacher, but principals weigh the set of questions measuring teachers' ability to improve student achievement and to manage a classroom most heavily. An increase of one standard deviation in a principal's evaluation of a teacher's management and teaching ability, for example, is associated with an increase of 0.56 standard deviations in the principal's overall rating. In comparison, an increase of one standard deviation in teacher collegiality is associated with an increase in overall ratings of roughly one-third of a standard deviation in overall rating. Meanwhile, teachers scoring one standard deviation higher in student satisfaction score just 0.15 standard deviations in their overall rating, all else being equal.



Our findings suggest that ratings by principals of a teacher's ability effectively predict their students' future achievement gains.

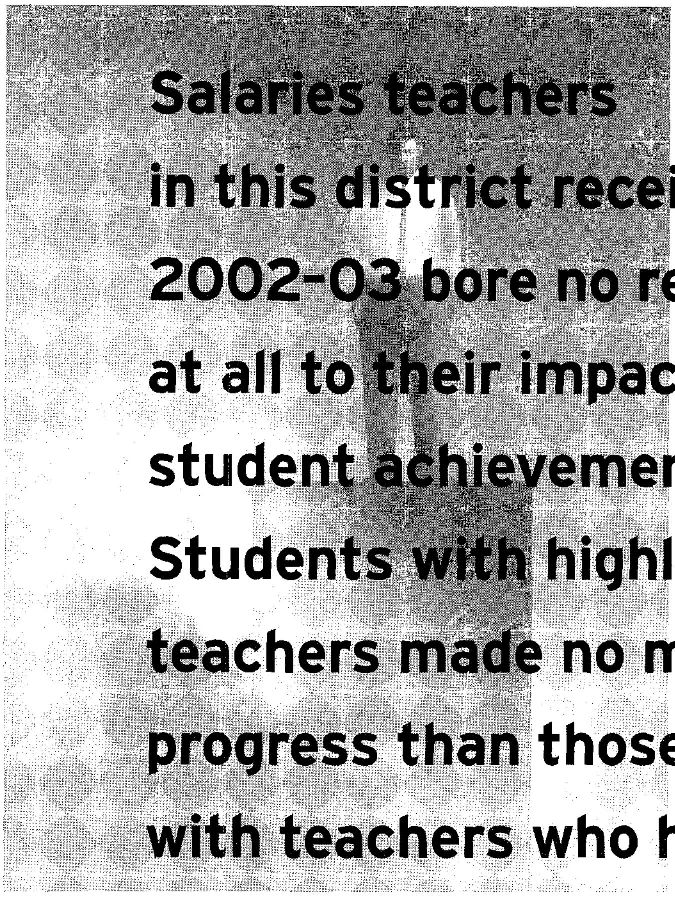
Predicting Performance

We should care about the quality of principals' assessments of teacher quality not just for their reliability in a merit-pay system, but also for their ability to identify teachers who will continue to improve student achievement. In order to get a sense of how well principals' assessments forecast teachers' performance, we examined how well these assessments predict future student achievement gains. For our February 2003 survey of principals, that meant evaluating scores on the spring 2003 tests. We compared the predictive accuracy of a principal's assessment of teacher effectiveness with the predictive accuracy of a teacher's value-added rating. We also measured the accuracy of the traditional determinants of teachers' salaries, experience and education, in predicting those scores. Throughout, we accounted for differences in previous student achievement, student demographics, and classroom characteristics.

Our findings suggest that ratings by principals, both overall ratings and ratings of a teacher's ability to improve achievement, effectively predict a student's future achievement gains (see Figure 1). Students whose teachers receive an overall rating one standard deviation above the mean are predicted to score roughly 0.06 standard deviations higher in reading than students whose teacher received an average rating. By way of comparison, students receiving free or reduced-price lunch in the same district experience achievement gains approximately 0.16 standard deviations lower than similar students who are not eligible for such programs. Assignment to a teacher with a favorable evaluation by her principal appears to be more important for math performance. An increase of one standard deviation in the principal's evaluation predicts an increase of 0.14 standard deviations in math performance, roughly on par with the disadvantage associated with coming from a low-income family.

Measures of teachers' value added in previous years are an even better predictor of future gains in students' achievement than are principal ratings. These results, which are similar for math and reading, suggest that teachers' impact on student achievement, as measured by simple value-added measures of teacher effectiveness, remain fairly stable over time and that principals' ratings effectively capture a substantial fraction of these stable differences in teachers' effectiveness.

We do not find any statistically significant relationship between the number of years a teacher has taught and students' achievement, though this is probably due to the necessary omission of first-year teachers (because we cannot measure their value added for a previous school year). Other studies have found that first-year teachers tend to perform worse on average than experienced teachers. Education does have some predictive power. Teachers with advanced degrees



Salaries teachers in this district received in 2002-03 bore no relation at all to their impact on student achievement. Students with highly paid teachers made no more progress than those with teachers who had low salaries.

have students who score roughly 0.10 standard deviations higher. We hesitate to say that education itself is producing these gains, because a teacher's level of education is likely to be associated with personal characteristics not accounted for in our analysis, and these may be the very factors responsible for the improvements in student achievement.

Perhaps our most interesting finding is that the salaries teachers in this district received in 2002–03 bore no relation at all to their impact on student achievement. Students with highly paid teachers made no more progress than those with teachers who had low salaries.

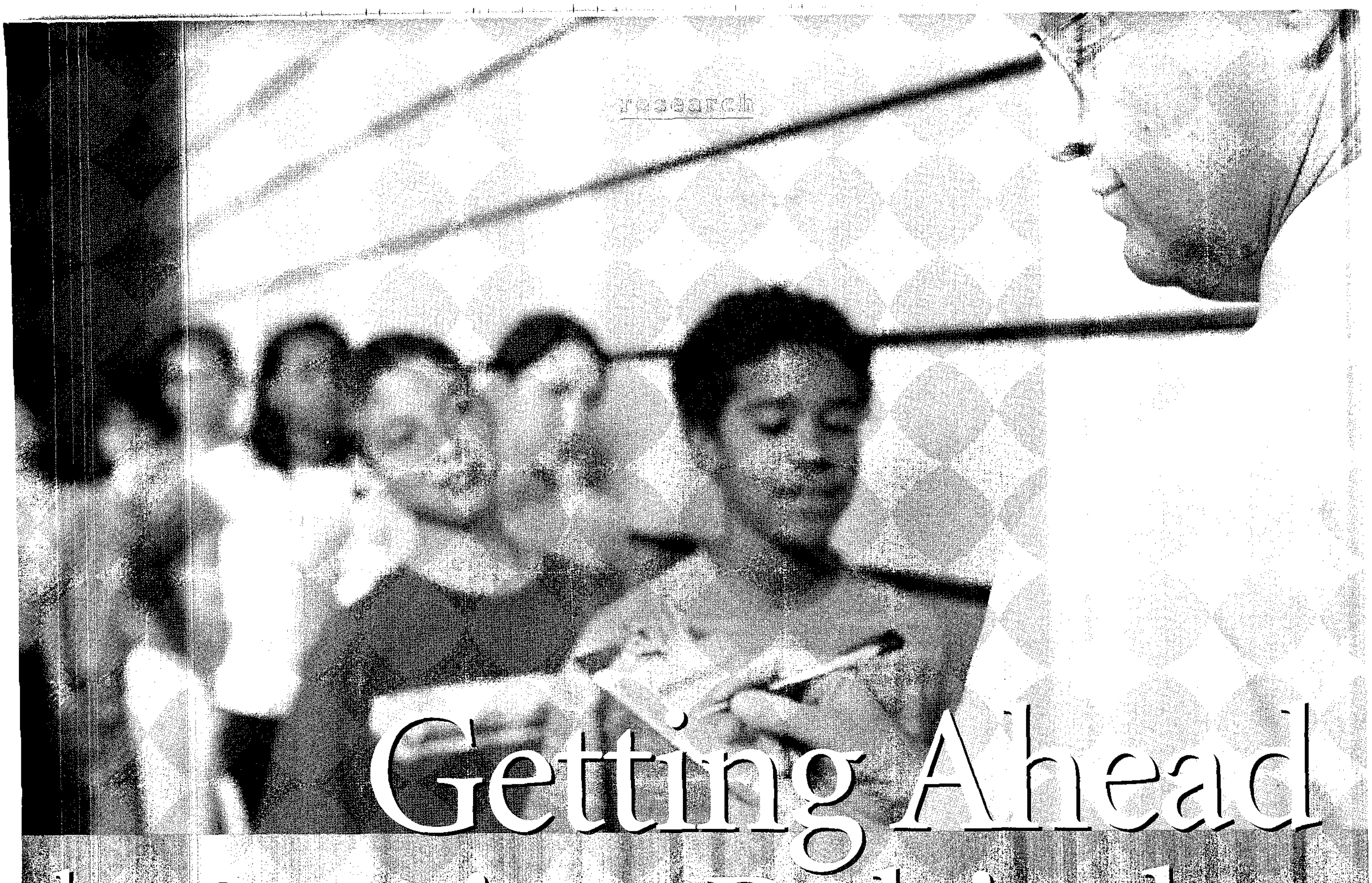
Conclusions

In sum, our results suggest that student achievement (as measured by standardized test scores) would probably improve more under a system based on principals' assessments than in systems where compensation is based solely on education and experience. This is because principals would be able to identify and reward the very best teachers while, at the same time, identifying the least competent teachers for remediation or dismissal.

To the extent that the most important staffing decisions involve sanctioning incompetent teachers and rewarding the very best teachers, a principal-based assessment system may affect achievement as positively as a merit-pay system based solely on student test results. Moreover, evaluation by the principal has the potential to offset some of the potential negative consequences of test-based accountability systems. If principals can observe inputs as well as outputs, they may be able to ensure that teachers increase student achievement through improvements in pedagogy, classroom management, or curriculum rather than teaching to the test. Principals can also evaluate teachers on the basis of a broader spectrum of educational outputs in addition to test scores that parents may value. At the same time, the inability of principals to distinguish between a broad middle range of teacher quality suggests caution in relying on principals for fine-grained performance determinations, as might be required under certain merit-pay policies.

Two important caveats to consider when interpreting our results. First, we conducted our analysis in a context where principals were not being evaluated on the basis of their ability to identify effective teachers. It is possible that principals' ability to identify the best-performing teachers would be enhanced by a school system where the principals had more responsibility for monitoring teachers' effectiveness. At the same time, social or political pressures might make principals less willing to assess teachers honestly if their judgments directly influenced teachers' compensation. Second, our analysis focuses on the *source* of the teacher assessment; we do not address the type of rewards or sanctions associated with teacher performance. This is clearly an important dimension of any performance management system, and one would not expect either a principal-based or a test-based assessment system to have a substantial impact on student outcomes unless it were accompanied by meaningful consequences.

Brian Jacob is assistant professor of public policy at the John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University and a faculty research fellow with the National Bureau of Economic Research. Lars Lefgren is assistant professor of economics, Brigham Young University.



PHOTOGRAPHY/GETTY IMAGES

Getting Ahead by Staying Behind

An Evaluation of Florida's Program to End Social Promotion

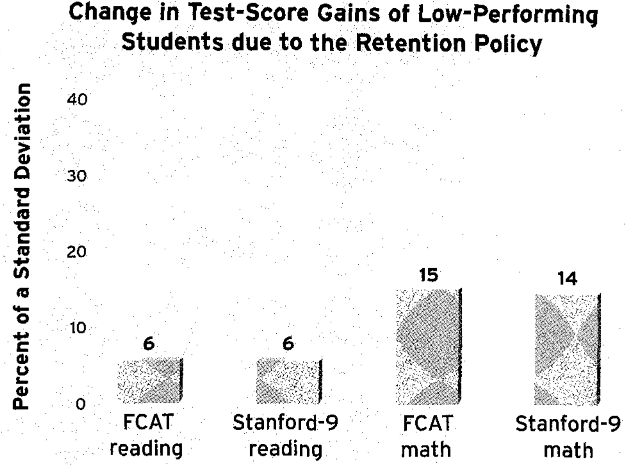
Of the many entrenched school customs that have been reconsidered and reformed over the past decade, social promotion has been among the most resistant to change. Holding children back in the same grade has long been frowned upon, and a large body of research seems to support that point of view: retained students tend to have lower test scores and are allegedly more likely to drop out than students who initially performed at an equally low level but were nevertheless promoted.

Despite the old habits and the old research, however, school districts across the nation have been slowly but steadily bucking convention. Several large systems, including Chicago (beginning in 1996), New York (2004), and Philadelphia (2005), now require students in particular grades to demonstrate a benchmark

BY JAY P. GREENE AND MARCUS A. WINTERS

A Productive Policy (Figure 1)

Low-scoring 3rd graders subjected to Florida's new retention policy in 2003 made larger test-score gains the following year than did comparable students not subjected to the policy who entered 3rd grade in 2002.



Note: All effects are statistically significant at the 0.001 level and control for differences in race, free or reduced-price lunch status, Limited English Proficiency status, and prior test scores.

SOURCE: Authors' calculations from Florida Department of Education data

level of mastery in basic skills on a standardized test before they can be promoted. Florida (2002) and Texas (2002) have taken the lead among states in forbidding social promotions. In 2000, the most recent year for which national enrollment data are available, these five school systems alone enrolled nearly 20 percent of the nation's 3rd-grade students. (For more on Chicago's policy, see Alexander Russo, "Retaining Retention," *features*, Winter 2005; and Robin Tepper Jacob and Susan Stone, "Teachers and Students Speak," *features*, Winter 2005.)

But is this new approach to grade promotion effective? And what about those studies that say retention doesn't work? Proponents of the new programs believe that schools do students no favor by promoting them if they don't have the skills to succeed at a higher level. But because these arguments, however plausible, have little research to support them, we set out to determine if they have scientific merit. Our findings from Florida suggest that the use of standardized testing policies to end social promotion can help low-performing students make modest improvements in reading and substantial improvements in math.

Florida's Program to End Social Promotion

Over the past several years Florida has attempted substantial reforms of its struggling public school system, the fourth-largest in the country and one that consistently ranks close to the bottom on academic indicators, including high-school graduation rates and scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). The Sunshine State had instituted school voucher programs, increased the number of charter schools, and devised a sophisticated accountability system that evaluates schools on the basis of their progress as measured by the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT). But in May 2002, the state legislature made one of its boldest moves, revising the School Code, the state's education law, to require 3rd-grade students to score at the Level-2 benchmark or above on the reading portion of the FCAT in order to be promoted to 4th grade.

The hurdle created for students was not terribly high. The state's department of education describes a student who scores at Level 2 (of five levels) as having "limited success" against the state standards; only students who score at Level 3 or above are considered to be proficient for the purposes of evaluating schools under No Child Left Behind. Even so, roughly 24 percent of 3rd graders tested in Florida in 2001–02, the year before the retention policy was introduced, performed below Level 2. This number fell slightly, to 22 percent, in the 2002–03 academic year.

Not all these students were retained, however, even after the policy change. The law allowed for exceptions to the retention policy if a student had limited English proficiency or a severe disability, scored above the 51st percentile on the Stanford-9 standardized test, had demonstrated proficiency through a performance portfolio, or had already been held back for two years. Altogether, roughly 40 percent of the 3rd-grade students who scored below the Level-2 threshold in 2002–03 were promoted.

The Problem with Earlier Studies

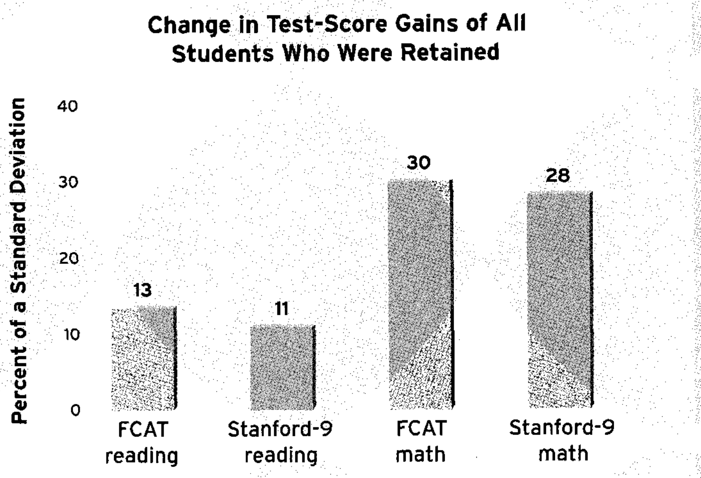
Traditionally, the retention of a student, uncommon as it was, resulted from an individual teacher's assessment of the student's ability to succeed at the next level. But such teacher discretion, while arguably desirable as a matter of policy, is the primary reason earlier studies of social promotion are flawed. We must assume from studying those retention programs, which are still the predominant practice in schools throughout the United States, that students who were held back were fundamentally different from students who were promoted. Because teachers were considering intangible factors, even when race, gender, family income, and academic achievement are the same, there was no way to isolate the effect of being held back, much less to make reasonable conclusions about the effects of retention on a student's academic achievement or the probability of his dropping out of high school. Are students who were retained less likely to graduate because they were retained? Or were they retained because of characteristics that also predisposed them to drop out? Because the retention policies were subjective, we will simply never know.

There are also reasons to believe that subjective retention policies affect students differently than policies that use promotion criteria like performance on standardized tests. If promotion depends on an individual teacher's assessment of a child, then that child is not likely to know what he or she must do to avoid being held back. Also, if few students were being held back, then those students might perform worse because they felt excluded and inferior. A policy that holds back thousands of students might dilute this sense of being singled out. Finally, subjective assessments of students are vulnerable to inappropriate influences, including teachers' prejudices and pressure brought by parents, in ways that objective criteria of performance might inhibit.

Implementing objective standards, even if they were accompanied by subjective exemptions, might significantly change the effects of retention in ways that previous research could not anticipate or measure. For research purposes, objective retention policies also create a useful comparison group of students not subject to retention. In the case of Florida's program to end social promotion, for example, we can compare students who were subject to the threat of retention with students who would have been had they been born a year later.

Retention Works (Figure 2)

Students retained in 2003 as a result of the new policy made substantially more progress in reading and, especially, in math than comparable students who were not retained.



Note: All effects are statistically significant at the 0.001 level and are adjusted for differences in race, free or reduced-price lunch status, Limited English Proficiency status, and prior test scores.

SOURCE: Authors' calculations from Florida Department of Education data

What a Difference a Year Makes

To determine the impact of ending social promotion for 3rd graders in Florida, we compared low-scoring 3rd graders in 2002, the first students to be subject to the program, with low-scoring 3rd graders from the previous year. Of the 43,996 3rd graders in 2002 for whom we have valid test scores on both FCAT math and reading assessments, 60 percent were actually retained. By contrast, of the 45,401 3rd graders in 2001 for whom we have valid test scores, only 9 percent were retained. Our analysis assumes that the students from the two school years should be similar in all respects except for the year in which they happened to have been born. We analyzed the test-score improvements made between each student's first 3rd-grade year and the following year on both the state's own accountability exam and the Stanford-9, a nationally normed exam administered at the same time as the FCAT but not used for accountability purposes.

We measure FCAT performance using developmental-scale scores, which allow us to compare the test-score gains of all the students in our study, even though they took tests designed for different grade levels. Developmental-scale scores are designed to measure academic proficiency on a single scale for students of any grade and in any year. For example, a 3rd grader with a developmental-scale score of 1,000 and a 4th grader with a developmental-scale score of 1,000 have the same level of academic achievement; if a student gets a developmental-scale score of 1,000 in 2001 and then gets the same score of 1,000 in 2002, this indicates that the student has not made any academic progress in the intervening year. The developmental-scale scores required to reach Level 2 on the FCAT reading test were consistent for each year's cohort.

We began by measuring the effect on all low-scoring 3rd graders of simply having been subject to the new policy. That is, we did not distinguish in our initial analysis between students who were actually retained and those who received an exemption and were promoted to the next grade. This analysis provides an estimate of the average impact of the policy change on all students in the state performing below the Level-2 benchmark. It also allows for the possibility that exempted students enjoyed spillover benefits from the retention policy, since they were now being instructed in a system in which fewer students in 4th grade were unprepared to do grade-level work.

To identify the policy's average impact, we compared the gains in developmental-scale scores made by students who first entered 3rd grade in 2002 and scored below the FCAT benchmark with gains made by students who first entered 3rd grade in 2001 and scored below the FCAT benchmark. In making this comparison, we took into account other factors that could affect achievement gains, such as the student's race, whether the student received a free or reduced-price school lunch, whether the student was deemed Limited English Proficient, and the student's precise test score during his first 3rd-grade year. With these differences accounted for, the only distinction between the two groups of students was assumed to be that the former group entered the school system a year later and was therefore subject to the new policy in 3rd grade.

As discussed above, however, many low-scoring 3rd graders were granted exemptions and promoted to the 4th grade even under the new policy. We therefore also evaluated the effect of actually being retained, again controlling for race, eligibility for free or reduced-price lunch, English proficiency, and baseline test scores. In conducting this analysis, we also needed to account for the fact that the students who were held back were a select group of students who could differ in important ways from the promoted students. Presumably, teachers and other decisionmakers expected these students, unlike promoted students, to benefit from an additional year as 3rd graders. Fortunately, the fact that simply having entered school a year later increased the probability of retention for all low-scoring students again provides a way around this obvious selection problem. In essence, the statistical method we use compares those retained students that our data suggest would not have been retained the previous year with a comparable group of students who were not retained. Our results therefore indicate the effect of retention on those students who were held back as a result of the new policy.

During this time, Florida was engaged in other education reforms as well: instituting several school-voucher programs, increasing the number of charter schools in the state, and improving the system used to assign grades to schools based on the FCAT. However, it is reasonable to assume that whatever effect these other policies have on our analyses is minor. In order for the existence of another policy to affect our results significantly, we would have to believe that the program substantially improved the education of the 3rd graders in 2002–03 without having a similar effect on the previous year's cohort. Moreover, while a sudden policy change could conceivably explain the overall improvements between the two cohorts, it is difficult to see how such a change could cause substantially larger gains among those students actually retained.

Retention Works

Our fundamental findings from an analysis of the 3rd- and 4th-grade data for these two years indicate that the performance of students identified for retention, regardless of whether they were retained or exempted and promoted, exceeded the performance of low-performing students from the previous year who were not subject to the retention policy; and students who were actually retained made the larger relative gains.

Students identified for retention by the Florida policy gained 0.06 of a standard deviation in reading on both the FCAT and Stanford-9 over equally low-performing 3rd graders from the previous school year (see Figure 1). In math, students identified for retention surpassed low performers who were not subject to the policy by 0.15 standard deviations (4.8 percentiles) on the FCAT and 0.14 standard deviations (4.4 percentiles) on the Stanford-9.

Students who were actually retained experienced even larger relative improvements (see Figure 2). Retained students performed better than low-scoring students who were promoted by 0.13 standard deviations (4.10 percentiles) on the FCAT and 0.11 standard deviations (3.45 percentiles) on the Stanford-9 in reading. In math retained students improved 0.30 standard deviations (10.0 percentiles) on the FCAT and 0.28 standard deviations (9.3 percentiles) on the Stanford-9 over promoted students.

Some critics of the new retention policies argued that teachers and schools would respond to them by manipulating test scores, either directly by cheating or indirectly by teaching students skills that would help them to improve their test scores but would not provide real academic proficiency. This argument would have merit only if we found strong gains on the high-stakes FCAT and no similar gains on the low-stakes Stanford-9, for which there is no incentive to manipulate scores. But our results are consistent between the FCAT and the Stanford-9, indicating that there have been no serious manipulations of the high-stakes testing system. If teachers are in fact changing their curricula with the intent to "teach to" the FCAT, they are doing so in ways that also contribute to gains on the highly respected Stanford-9. This would indicate that teachers have made changes resulting in real increases in students' proficiency.

An unexpected benefit of the retention policy is the improvement in math scores. This might seem odd, given that it is the reading portion of the FCAT that students must pass to earn promotion and that the rhetoric supporting Florida's retention program emphasizes that it will improve student literacy. Of course, the math gains could simply reflect the fact that math skills are learned primarily in schools, while reading is practiced both in and outside of school. For this reason, evaluations of school reforms frequently find stronger effects in math than in reading. Alternatively, it may be that students who were retained specifically because of their poor reading skills are particularly poor in that subject and that this limits their room for improvement.

Our results show gains of similar sizes by the three racial groups for which we have an adequate sample size: white, black, and Hispanic.

We also explored the possibility that the objective retention program could have different effects on students of different races. Our results show gains of similar sizes by the three racial groups for which we have an adequate sample size to have reasonable confidence in our findings: white, black, and Hispanic. The exception is for whites' performance on the FCAT reading test. It is difficult for us to interpret why white students would fail to benefit from the retention policy as measured by the FCAT reading test but would be shown to benefit as measured by the Stanford-9 reading test.

Our results also suggest that low-scoring Florida 3rd graders who were given an exemption and promoted might have benefited from another year in the 3rd grade. This does not mean that it would be wise to eliminate all exemptions to the testing requirement. There are certainly students for whom testing is either inappropriate or whose performance on other academic measures could reasonably indicate that they would be better served by moving on to the next grade. However, our findings do indicate that teachers and school systems should be cautious when granting exemptions.

What It Means

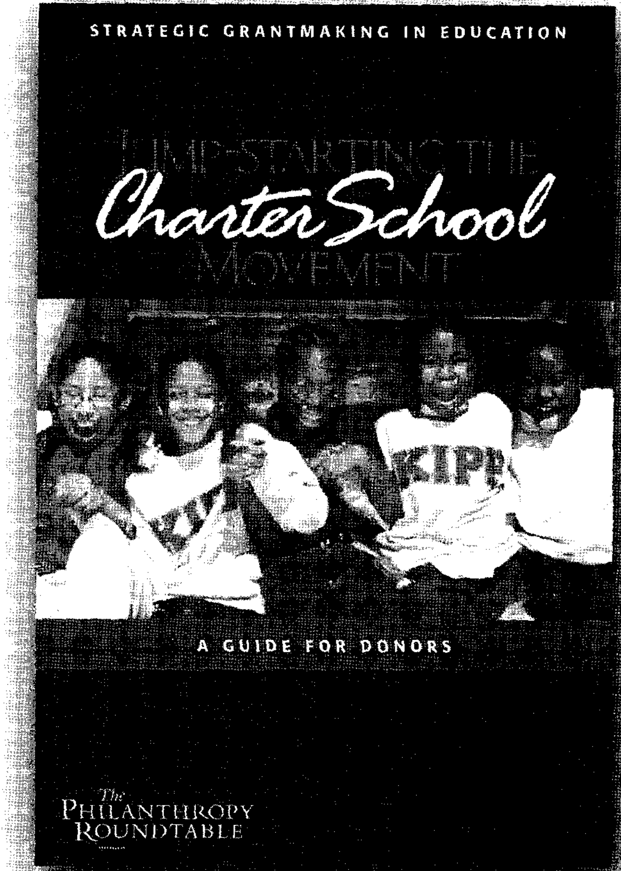
At first glance our findings seem inconsistent with evaluations of Chicago's program ending social promotion, to our knowledge the only similarly designed retention policy to be evaluated using comparable methods. In Chicago, students in the 3rd, 6th, and 8th grades must exceed benchmarks on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS), a respected standardized test, in order to be promoted to the next grade. In a study conducted in 2004 by scholars at the Consortium on Chicago School Research, the performance of 3rd- and 6th-grade students who scored just below the benchmark on the ITBS, most of whom were retained because of the mandate, was compared with the performance of students who scored just above the benchmark, most of whom were promoted. The Chicago researchers were able to measure test-score performance for two years after implementation of the program. They found benefits from the program after one year, similar to what we found in Florida, but discovered that those benefits went away after the second year. Third-grade students were not affected, and 6th-grade students were negatively affected by the policy in their performance on the ITBS reading test. The findings on the Chicago retention program emphasize the importance of following the progress of retained students in Florida over time.

Still, the Chicago policy differs from Florida's in some respects. In 1999 the Chicago policy stopped allowing students to be retained twice, which Florida's policy does allow. This difference might reduce teachers' motivation to work with already retained students, whom they now can expect to be promoted the next year regardless of their performance. Other programs with different and more stable retention policies might show different results.

Finally, while our study provides valuable information about the effectiveness of Florida's policy to end social promotion, it does not offer a full catalog of the policy's benefits or of its potential costs. It will be some time before we can examine whether retention increased or reduced the probability of dropping out of school later on. Most important, it does not provide any information about the program's effects on students' academic progress the first time they were in 3rd grade. The policy's greatest benefits could result not from retention itself, but rather from increased efforts on the part of teachers and even students to avoid being retained in the first place.

Jay P. Greene is professor and head of the Department of Education Reform, the University of Arkansas; he is also a senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute. Marcus A. Winters is a doctoral fellow, the University of Arkansas and a senior research associate at the Manhattan Institute.

STRATEGIC GRANTMAKING IN *Education*


STRATEGIC GRANTMAKING IN EDUCATION
JUMP-STARTING THE
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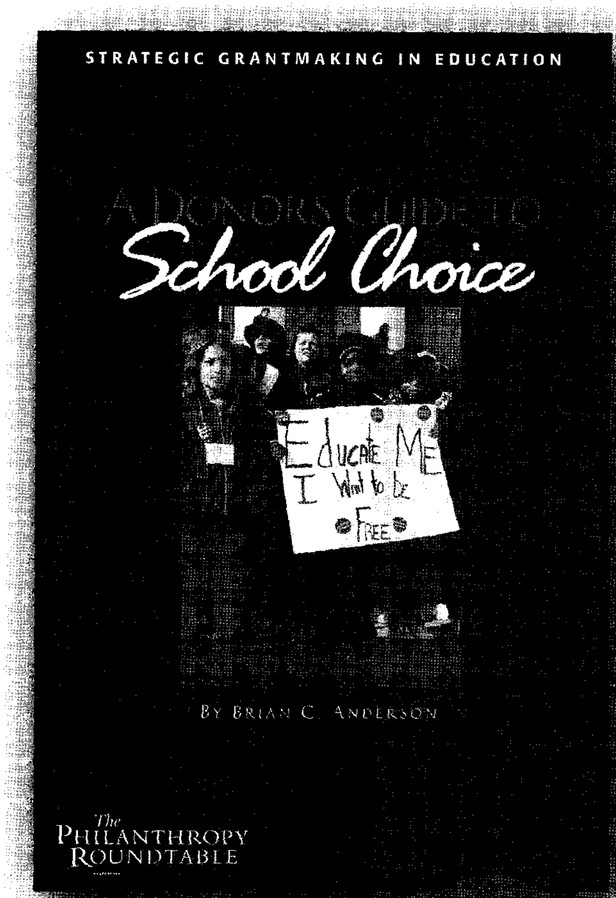
A GUIDE FOR DONORS
The PHILANTHROPY ROUNDTABLE

Jump-starting the Charter School Movement: A Guide for Donors

The Roundtable commissioned this guide in order to provide donors of all shapes and sizes with strategic ways to support a strong charter school movement in their communities and across the nation. This book draws on the experience of the most active and effective charter funders.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Savage Exaggerations

Worshiping the cosmology of Jonathan Kozol

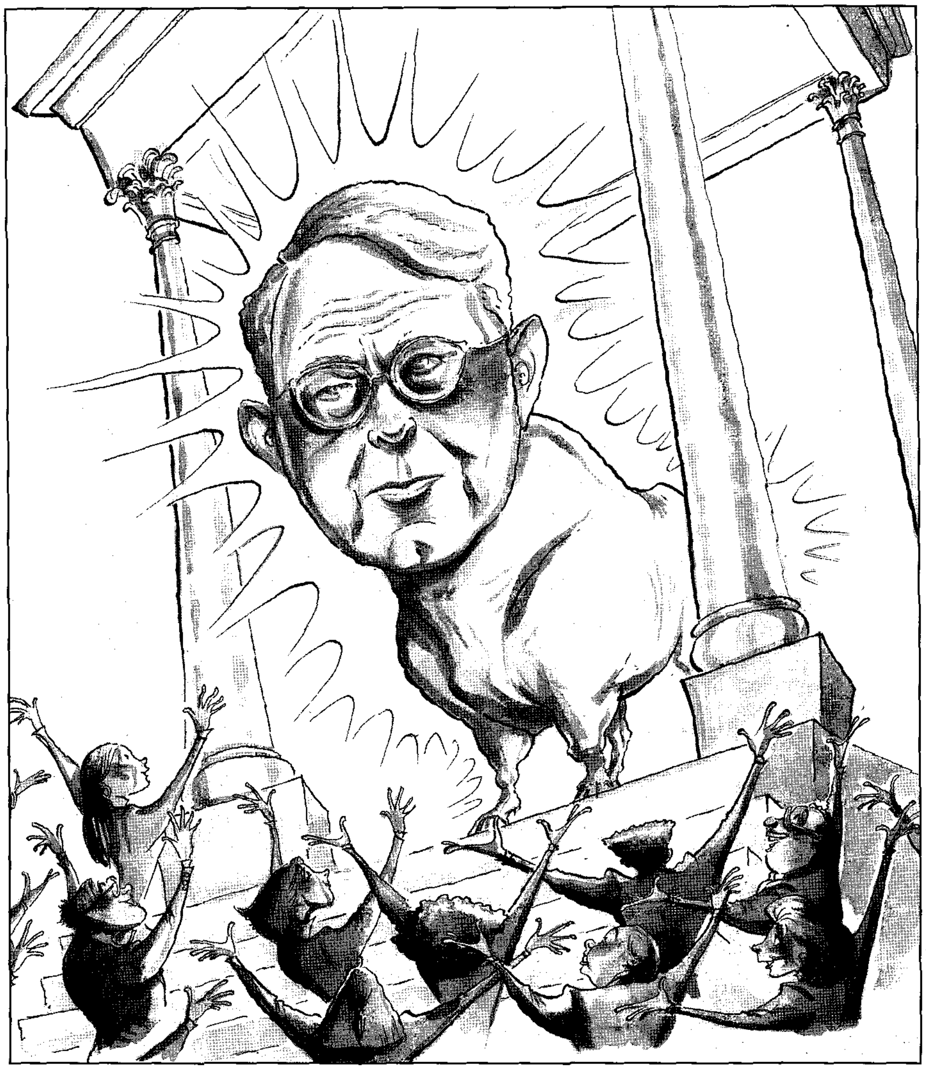


ILLUSTRATION / MICHAEL WITTE

Checked:

The Shame of the Nation: The Restoration of Apartheid Schooling in America. Crown Publishers, 2005

Ordinary Resurrections: Children in the Years of Hope. Crown Publishers, 2000

Savage Inequalities: Children in America's Schools. Crown Publishers, 1991

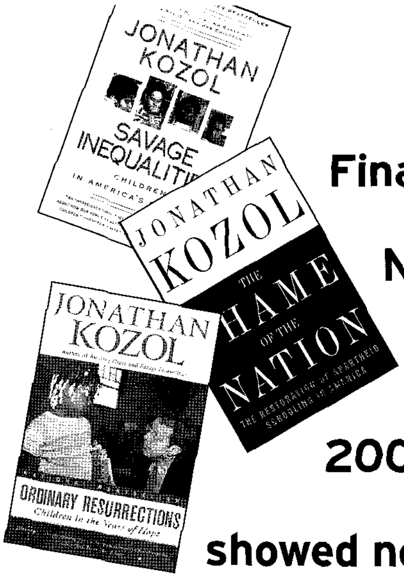
Free Schools. Houghton Mifflin Company, 1972

Death at an Early Age. Penguin Group, 1967

Checked by Marcus A. Winters

Jonathan Kozol has made a good living talking with students. His books chronicle travels among poor, minority children, most of them African Americans in struggling public schools. They are not gentle accounts. His first book, published in 1967, was called *Death at an Early Age.* Nor are his books politically tepid: his latest, published in 2005, is called *The Shame of the Nation: The Restoration of Apartheid Schooling in America.*

In the four decades that Jonathan Kozol, now 70, has been writing books—11 so far—his message has hardly wavered: minority children are unsuccessful because rich, white Americans have little interest in using their vast resources to help them. In each of his works Kozol seems intent on burdening other white upper-class Americans with guilt enough for them to see the light and share their wealth. With this attractive message Kozol has won a loyal following among school teachers, policymakers, and book-reading citizens. Not only are many of his books bestsellers, but they have become staples on education-course syllabi. Even education researchers think his work has value: he has been cited 1,790 times in journals counted in the Social Science Citation Index, quite a feat for a popular author. Ordinarily, only influential scholars achieve such recognition. *Shame of the Nation* got a prepublication boost when *Harper's* magazine ran an excerpt and featured


JONATHAN KOZOL
SAVAGE INEQUALITIES
CHILDREN IN AMERICA'S SCHOOLS
JONATHAN KOZOL
THE SHAME OF THE NATION
THE RESTORATION OF APARTHEID SCHOOLING IN AMERICA
JONATHAN KOZOL
ORDINARY RESURRECTIONS
Children in the Years of Hope

Financial inequalities in urban New Jersey had largely been done away with by 2000-01, yet school outcomes showed no discernible improvement.

it on the cover. The author also received a fawning *New York Times Magazine* interview; *Shame* leaped on to the *Times* bestseller list two weeks after its publication in September.

The notoriety has perhaps gone to Kozol's head. In his first book, *Death at an Early Age,* he described the horrific experience of teaching at, and being fired from, a segregated public school in Boston. The book has the feel of being written by a young, dedicated, public school teacher on the frontlines of a major battle, which is exactly what Kozol was. So open to new ideas was he at that time that in another of his earlier volumes, *Free Schools,* he even hinted at a solution not much different from the one advocated by choice supporters today. More on that later.

In the books that have followed, however, Kozol, no longer in the trenches, seems to have less to write about and offers little more than the old, tired, and failed solutions for the problems of our schools. He tells similar stories, revisits old haunts, has, essentially, the same conversations. Adding to the monotony, Kozol's most recent books, in fact, are as much about him as about American education. They contain long digressions about his compassionate understanding of the plight of urban youth. In my copy of *Ordinary Resurrections,* published in 2000, Kozol is even featured on the cover, showing the dramatic transformation of the author from reporter of others' stories to chronicler of his own. Though he writes with a compelling sense of injustice, much of Kozol's work is a form of self-reflection that masks—brilliantly, given the popularity of his books—what is an increasingly skewed description of our nation's schools.

Though it is difficult to judge Kozol's specific impact on education policy in America, there is no doubt of his influence on the way Americans frame the questions that drive that policymaking. But is the Kozol prism a clarifying one? Is his insistence on our racial sins a sufficient or even accurate way to understand our education problems?

Those Slippery Facts

Shame of the Nation, as its subtitle proclaims, purports to be about segregation. Kozol's point that urban public schools are too racially homogeneous is certainly not novel; many urban public schools clearly have majority single-race populations. However, Kozol misses the mark in attributing that problem to, or suggesting that its solution is in, our education system. In fact, as Duke economist Charles Clotfelter has pointed out, segregation levels *within* school districts have actually decreased since the 1970s, after allowing for the changing demographic of urban populations. That decrease has only been offset by the tendency of higher-income families, both black and white, to move to suburban communities with more family-friendly schools and safer environments.

Kozol recognizes that migration is the explanation for continuing segregation, but says its cause is racism. This leads him to propose policies that are so impractical as to be unhelpful. For example, he advocates school busing and other such measures that attempt to get whites to mingle with blacks through coercion, measures that are outside the realm of the politically feasible. Oddly, he rejects more promising policies that rely less on the power of the state. He eschews school-choice policies, for instance, even while conceding that they have led to school desegregation in cities where they have been tried. He says that choice does not work unless it is regulated. Even if we concede his point, it is unclear why he should oppose regulated choice policies if they work. Why should integration be worthwhile only if it is forced?

That Kozol expresses such strenuous opposition to vouchers is all the more peculiar, given his earlier passion for "Free Schools." His 1972 book of that title is a manual on how to start and operate private schools outside what he saw as an excessively regulated public school system. In *Free Schools,* Kozol wrote that urban parents should exit the public school system because reforms within the system, "no matter how inventive or how passionate or how immediately provocative," are simply an "extension of the ideology of public school." Those reforms, said Kozol, "cannot, for reasons of immediate operation, finance, and survival, raise serious doubts about the indoctrination and custodial function of the public education apparatus."

Racist Reforms

But his tune on that particular reform has changed since he became the idol of that same education establishment.

Now Kozol has little interest in improvements outside the current system, such as vouchers and charters. Why? Because, he says in *Shame*, it "opens up a gate of sorts for a small fraction of poor people." Never mind that the body of empirical evidence suggests that choice helps not only the children who leave failing public schools but also those left behind. Studies of voucher programs in Florida, Milwaukee, and San Antonio all find that vouchers not only have not harmed public schools; they have improved them.

Vouchers are not the only reform to which Kozol objects. On the contrary, he treats almost any proposed restructuring as little more than racism in disguise. "Although generically described as 'school reform,'" he writes in *Shame*, "most of these practices and policies are targeted at poor children of color," failing to explain why reform should not be directed at the lowest-performing schools. One favorite Kozol target is accountability testing, which is treated as a racist plot to harm minority children, hatched by "politically conservative white people."

In *Shame* Kozol pays particular attention to Success for All, a schoolwide reform program that requires teachers to follow strict schedules and test students frequently. He likens Success for All, now used in more than 1,200 schools nationwide, to a military training facility. And not just any military facility: "My attention was distracted by some whispering among the children sitting to the right of me. The teacher's response to this distraction was immediate: His arm shot out and up in a diagonal in front of him, his hand straight up, his fingers flat. The young co-teacher did this too. When they saw their teachers do this, all the children in the classroom did it too." It was all there, for Kozol, except for the "*Sieg Heil!*"

So committed is this veteran author to damning interventions designed to preserve order in the classroom that he overlooks the considerable evidence that Success for All actually helps exactly that population for which Kozol expresses a profound allegiance. As is his wont, he ignores the results from a randomized field trial, conducted by Johns Hopkins researchers, that found that Success for All has large, statistically significant positive effects on student literacy.

The Original Sin: Unequal Education Spending

So, besides desegregating schools, what does Kozol want to do? Surprisingly enough, for all of his self-expressed idealism, he turns out to be as naive a materialist as one would expect from someone who has found his own moneymaking formula. Again and again Kozol returns to his primary message: give those schools more money! No reform short of unloading a dump-truck filled with hundred-dollar bills on the campus of each urban public school will solve today's education ills.

While his books consist largely of a series of sad stories, it is Kozol's use of numbers that gives those stories their meaning and impact. He and his faithful readers believe that the dollars not spent on education make all the difference. To highlight the funding disparities in urban centers, Kozol produces an appendix in both *Shame of the Nation* and *Savage Inequalities* with tables comparing per pupil spending in several cities, including New York, Chicago, and urban New Jersey, with that in select surrounding suburban districts. Not surprisingly, the wealthiest districts in the area spend a good deal more money than the most poverty-stricken parts of the city.

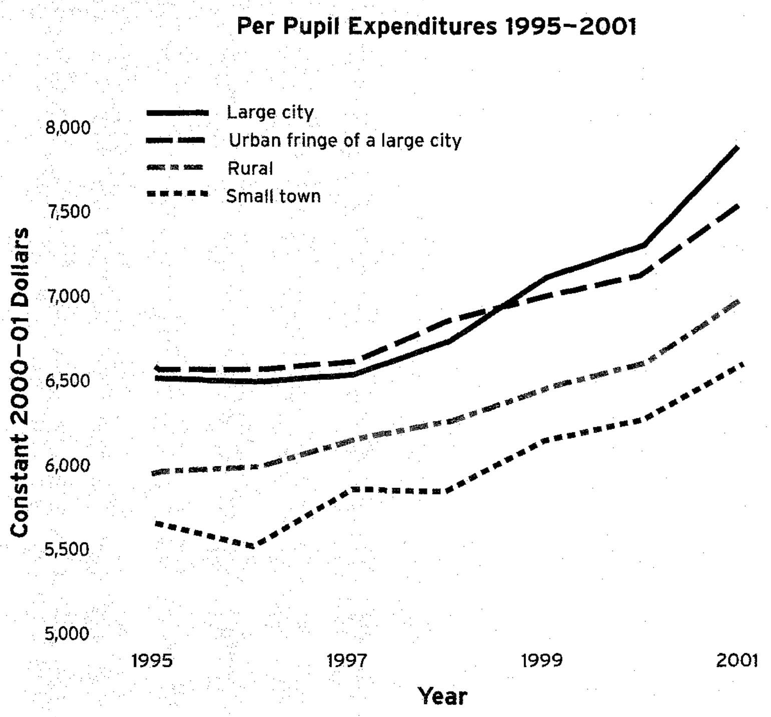
Kozol points out that the wealthiest suburban school districts surrounding New York City, for example, spend more per pupil to educate their mostly white student bodies than the city spends to educate its mostly minority population. He produces interviews with children in schools receiving less funding; the children ask, in their small voices, why it is that they do not have everything that rich children have. It is a powerful rhetorical device perhaps, but not one that has much bearing on the question of student outcomes. The fact is, though Kozol ignores it, that changing the incentives of urban schools (with choice or accountability) yields much more of a change in performance than more money does.

One indication that more spending might not be the answer is that while urban public schools might not spend as much as the wealthiest districts surrounding them, they do spend what those wealthy districts spent in the past. For example, Kozol points to funding disparities around Boston, which is where he started his career. In 1999 Weston, a Boston suburb, spent $10,039 per pupil, in adjusted 2003 dollars, and that year its 4th-grade students averaged a scale score of 248 on the state reading test. In 2003 the Boston school district spent $10,057 per pupil, similar to what Weston spent in 1999 in real dollars. However, while Boston's spending caught up to Weston's previous expenditures, its test scores did not. Boston's students scored an average of 224 on the 4th-grade reading assessment in 2003. Boston's reading scores were only a one-point improvement from 1999, when the district spent an inflation-adjusted $9,213. Similarly, in their book *No Excuses*, the Manhattan Institute's Abigail and Stephan Thernstrom point out that the financial inequalities in urban New Jersey had largely been done away with by 2000–01, yet school outcomes showed no discernible improvement. Since suburban students certainly have other advantages over the average student in the cities, we might not expect equal spending to produce identical results. But if Kozol is right, shouldn't it at least bring about progress?

Kozol's analysis is just as wrong elsewhere in the country. New York City schools, for instance, might spend less

Where the Most Bucks Stop (Figure 1)

Large urban school districts now spend more per pupil than districts in other geographic locations.



SOURCE: National Center for Education Statistics, "The Condition of Education"

than the few school districts that educate the sons and daughters of New York's investment bankers (who live in those rich suburbs). My analysis, using the same data on school districts in the Empire State that Kozol cites, finds that districts with a higher percentage of African American students actually spend more money than other districts in the state on average.

A Relative Problem

Kozol scoffs at figures suggesting that schools are failing to improve despite increases in funding. In *Savage Inequalities* he attempts to rebut what is perhaps the most popular critique among education reformers—that over the past 30 years there has been a doubling in real dollars in education spending and no significant progress in education achievement measured in test scores or graduation rates. Discussing a *Wall Street Journal* editorial that pointed this out, Kozol writes, in *Savage Inequalities*, "What the *Journal* does not add is that per-pupil spending grew at the same rate in the suburbs as it did in urban districts … thereby preventing any catch-up by the urban schools." The most important education reform, in Kozol's view, is for urban schools to have as much money as the richest suburban ones. He ignores the fact that, overall, central-city schools outspend the typical suburban school, to say nothing of those in small towns and rural areas (see Figure 1).

But why should a district's performance depend entirely on what is happening elsewhere? Greater spending must lead to at least some education gains as long as the funds are well spent. Kozol is the first to argue that urban schools lack the physical amenities of suburban schools. So when urban schools get more money, as even Kozol admits has been the case, why can't those amenities be provided, regardless of what suburban schools are doing? If a school lacks air-conditioning, for example, and if one expects this amenity to affect student performance, then the addition of air-conditioning should improve outcomes regardless of whether another school builds a swimming pool.

Kozol argues that only relative spending matters, because both suburban and urban schools are hiring out of the same labor pool. Thus it might not matter how much urban districts spend, because as long as they spend less than other districts they will get the same poor-quality teachers. But this assumes that the labor pool for teachers cannot change. As schools have more money they should either bid up the price for teachers or be able to hire more teachers at the same price. In theory, either of these changes should lift all boats, either by improving the overall quality of the labor pool or by reducing class size. If more money does not provide better amenities, or a higher quality workforce, or smaller classes, or if it produces these things and performance does not improve, then we must conclude that more money is not the answer.

Kozol often insists that he will believe that more money will not improve urban public schools when rich Americans stop trying to spend more money on their schools. The trouble with this seemingly reasonable quip is that it fails to recognize that urban and suburban schools are more separated by their incentive structure than they are by their bank accounts.

If we assume that suburban districts improve with greater funds (perhaps a stronger assumption than many realize), it is also reasonable to assume that they face consequences if they use those additional resources unwisely. If suburban schools do not live up to their price tag, then their active parents and other taxpayers worried about their property values put pressure on policymakers to improve them. If the school continues to fail, suburbanites will move to the next town over, or they will send their child to a private school.

On the other side of the tracks, however, urban schools have a captive clientele. Low-income minority parents have neither the resources to move out of their city nor the political power to force policymakers to meet their education needs. Without consequences for failure, urban public schools have little incentive to use their resources wisely. Thus increasing urban public-school budgets will fail to improve their performance until urban schools are operating under the same incentives as suburban schools. Kozol blithely ignores the existence of these differing incentives in his Ahab-like pursuit of more money.

When we step back and look at the evidence, it becomes clear that changing the incentives for urban public schools is far more attractive a reform than providing them with more funds. Increasingly, the scientific research indicates little to no relationship between escalating education expenditures and improvements in academic outcomes. Erik Hanushek's 1996 review of the research on school funding found that only 27 of 163 studies indicated that spending more dollars improved student outcomes. Kozol ignores these findings. He ignores the evidence (by Hanushek and Margaret Raymond, as well as by Martin Carnoy and Susanna Loeb) that changing the incentives for public schools with high-stakes testing is succeeding where simply increasing resources has failed. He ignores the wide body of research suggesting that school-choice policies improve public schools by forcing them to compete for students that they used to take for granted. He laments that paying teachers for their successful performance taints their "unselfish inclinations that are not at all unlike the call to ministry," without discussing the evidence suggesting that these programs have been successful at improving student outcomes.

Who Needs Research?

Kozol is contemptuous of empirical research on education. Test scores, he says, tell us nothing about the number of times a day that a child smiles, which is what really counts in our schools. Kozol feels it unnecessary to rely on empirical measures of achievement because they "don't speak of happiness." We can understand schools only by walking around in them and talking with children. In *Shame of the Nation*, he writes that he trusts his interviews with children because, "Unlike these powerful grown-ups, children have no ideologies to reinforce, no superstructure of political opinion to promote, no civic equanimity or image to defend, no personal reputation to secure."

Unfortunately, what all but the most unusual children lack is perspective, foresight, and knowledge. This is why we don't let children marry, imbibe alcohol, or, for that matter, decide what time they will go to sleep. We should be similarly hesitant to base decisions that cost billions of dollars and might affect the structure of society on their musings.

What makes children so useful to a Kozol-style researcher is the ease with which the researcher can evoke the answers that are sought, especially when one can pick and choose from among the children one wants to include in the next bestseller.

When one follows the basic canons of social science, which require sensitivity to the biases of respondents and the biases that can come from selecting individuals in any way other than randomly, then one cannot so easily construct fanciful castles out of the comments of either children or adults. That is the greatest virtue of the social-science methodologies that Kozol regularly denigrates. Quality research forces us to step back, removing ourselves from our predispositions and the feelings that might force our eyes to lie to us. Statistics can surely be manipulated, as Kozol himself proves, but at least the limitations are verifiable and the truth of the matter is not dependent on the eye of the beholder.

Admittedly, many scholars pay more attention to how well children are doing on tests designed to measure how much they are learning in school than to the simplistic responses children tend to give. But that is the only way we can find out if they know how to read, or write, or add numbers. Without skills, these children whom Kozol professes to love so dearly, and whom he quotes so extensively, will never acquire the skills that will allow them to lead happy, productive adult lives. Money is Kozol's only reform model, and it will hardly preserve the smile on those children's faces.

It's difficult to visualize the system Kozol wants for us. Beyond his insistent pleas for an equitable distribution of the money in education, he provides few specifics. In fact, though, the best argument against Kozol's prescription is that the money spent on American public schools doubled over the past 30 years—yet outcomes in education have remained as savagely unequal as ever and will remain so until the incentives of urban schools are changed. To the extent that it persuades people to avoid reforms that change school incentives in favor of ever-increasing school spending, Jonathan Kozol's work is an impediment to the very thing that he claims to desire most: a day when urban minority children receive an acceptable education.

Marcus A. Winters is a senior research associate at the Manhattan Institute for Policy Research. He is also a doctoral fellow in the department of education reform at the University of Arkansas.

High School

Tales from the Inside

Another Planet: A Year in the Life of a Suburban High School

By Elinor Burkett

HarperCollins, 2001, $12.95; 352 pages.

Brief Intervals of Horrible Sanity: One Season in a Progressive School

By Elizabeth Gold

Tarcher/Penguin, 2003, $15.95; 336 pages.

Class Dismissed: A Year in the Life of an American High School, a Glimpse into the Heart of a Nation

By Meredith Maran

St Martin's Griffin, 2000, $14.95; 256 pages.

School of Dreams: Making the Grade at a Top American High School

By Edward Humes

Harvest Books, 2004, $14.00; 400 pages.

Wonderland: A Year in the Life of an American High School

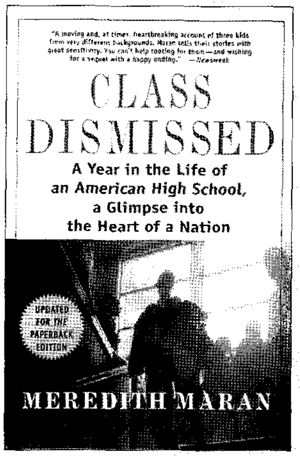
By Michael Bamberger

Atlantic Monthly Press, 2004, $13.00; 214 pages.

Reviewed by David Ferrero

Much has been written recently about the deplorable state of the American high school. Commissioned reports, journal articles, data displays, and assorted charts and graphs tell us that high schools are at best obsolete and at worst human-rights atrocities. Graduation rates are appalling. Curricula are incoherent. Access to good schools depends on what zip code a family can afford to live in. Such analyses recommend higher standards, better teachers, smaller schools, more Advanced Placement (AP) classes and better assessments, usually without considering the actual experience of the people who inhabit our high schools.

For those of us who traffic in policy fixes for a living, it is worth asking: What do today's high schools look like from the inside? What impact have the various policy machinations over the past generation had on today's students and teachers?


"A moving and, at times, heartbreaking account of three kids from very different backgrounds. Maran tells their stories with great sensitivity. You can't help rooting for them—and wishing for a sequel with a happy ending." —Newsweek
CLASS DISMISSED
A Year in the Life of an American High School, a Glimpse into the Heart of a Nation
UPDATED FOR THE PAPERBACK EDITION
MEREDITH MARAN

Those of us without the time or inclination to relive high school can choose from a small range of books published over the past several years by noneducators (usually journalists) who, provoked by events at Columbine, piqued by their own children's high-school experience, or simply in need of a job, took a semester or a year off to revisit the scene of so much youthful Sturm und Drang. The five books under review here cover a lot of ground: suburb and city, both coasts and the Midwest, conventional high schools, and alternatives to them.

What makes these volumes particularly valuable for professional reformers is that they are written by people who hadn't previously thought much about high school except as a piece of their pasts. They have no current professional stake in how or whether high schools are reformed. And so they offer reasonably unbiased portraits of people—teachers, administrators, students—whose lives are nonetheless affected by the action or inaction of advocates and policymakers. From their stories emerges a fleshy and nuanced profile of the American high school at the turn of the 21st century.

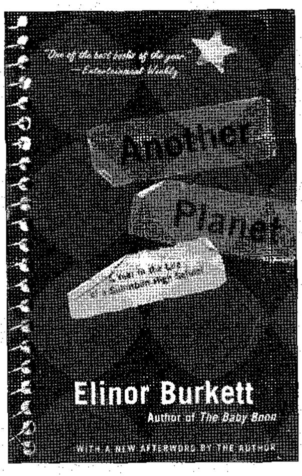
From Berkeley to Prior Lake

Career reformers might start with Meredith Maran's *Class Dismissed* and Elinor Burkett's *Another Planet*, the two books in this set that come closest to the familiar jeremiads against comprehensive public high schools. Maran profiles Berkeley High School, a large urban school in the California city made famous by free speech and now considered by many, says Maran, to be "the most integrated in the country." Burkett focuses on Prior Lake High School in a suburb of Minneapolis. Both spent a year in their respective schools listening in on classes, conducting interviews, documenting key events, and following small numbers of students and teachers. Both organize their retellings as chronicles spanning one academic year.

The contrast between the schools is remarkable. Where Prior Lake enrolls a little over 1,000 students, more than 90 percent of them white and only 1 in 20 on free or reduced-price lunch, Berkeley houses 3,000 students, one-fourth of whom are low-income and two-thirds of whom are nonwhite. These different locations and demographics play out in ways one would expect concerning the relative salience of race, violence, community politics, and so on. For example, where Prior Lake grapples with an assortment of minor pranks and ritual subversions on the part of disaffected students, Berkeley High confronts an arsonist whose fires pose an escalating safety threat to students and staff.

But it is the similarities that stand out. Both books, for example, highlight the ways in which schools reflect and reproduce the social stratifications of the communities that constitute them. Maran, a writer and mother of two Berkeley High graduates, tracks three students in particular: a biracial girl who needs to work to support her single-parent family, an affluent white boy, and a black football player who aspires to an athletic scholarship. Though they all wrestle with personal problems—for example, the affluent student suffers from depression brought on by the death of his father, who suffered from a drug addiction—their experiences within school vary in predictable ways. The athlete, we discover, is relegated to dead-end remedial courses and is allowed to persist in his delusion that his athletic prowess will win him a full ride through college; his experience prompts Maran to explore in some detail how academic tracking and other more subtle differences in teachers' expectations contribute to a situation where 60 percent of white Berkeley High graduates attend a four-year college, while only 14 percent of black students earn enough credits to do so.

Surprisingly, it's similar at Prior Lake. Burkett slices the student body up by subcultures, each experiencing school in a different way. Drawn to her project by the Columbine shootings, Burkett, a journalist and professor at the University of Alaska, pays special attention to the disaffected students. One such student is Tony Lorentz, an alienated upperclassman and modestly talented poet who in his three years at Prior Lake has made high craft of cynical slacking, going so far as to codify his behavior with rules such as "show up for class and pay any semblance of attention." Burkett documents many such students and conversations, exposing a subtle "conspiracy of low expectations," by the students themselves, that is all the more striking because of the school's relative affluence.


One of the best books of the year —Entertainment Weekly
Another Planet
A Year in the Life of a Suburban High School
Elinor Burkett
Author of The Baby Boon
WITH A NEW AFTERWORD BY THE AUTHOR

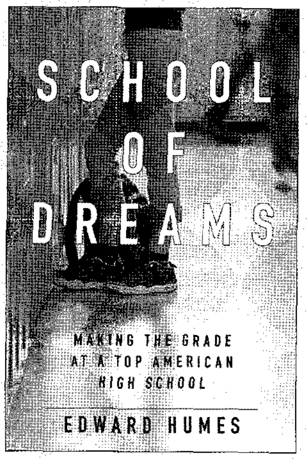
Burkett introduces us to a pleasant, well-run school led by a committed and capable principal, staffed by well-credentialed teachers, and attended by mostly well-cared-for kids. If any place should serve as a model of what a comprehensive high school could be, Prior Lake is it. Yet no matter what the adults do in the name of standards, or equity, or the whole child, it somehow comes out muddled and uninspired. An effort on the part of an English teacher to use *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* as a vehicle for teaching about racism yields mixed results, with some students cluing in, others never getting past the pat answer, and still others openly declaring their indifference. Numerous attempts to coax students out of their shells, engage them in important issues, and motivate them to perform on tests fall flat.

It's not as if the adults in the building are ignorant or indifferent. In fact, they wring their hands constantly about the situation, flirting with every innovation in the reform literature, from zero-tolerance policies (an overreaction to Columbine) to self-esteem building. As the story unfolds and incidents accumulate, a striking subtext becomes evident: Prior Lake proves neither a bastion of progressive education nor a traditionalist stronghold, but an ad hoc blend of the worst of both, implemented by well-intentioned adults and ignored, resisted, or ridiculed by students who see right through every ploy and contradiction.

No matter what the adults do in the name of standards, or equity, or the whole child, it somehow comes out muddled and uninspired.

Stand on Your Head in Cerritos

At Edward Humes's *School of Dreams*, by contrast, the students care a lot about their schooling. Based on his yearlong experience in 2001–02 at Whitney High School, an ethnically diverse 7–12 secondary school in Cerritos, California, and one of the highest-performing high schools in the state, Humes describes a well-oiled achievement machine. Humes, a writer and Pulitzer Prize–winning reporter when he was at the Orange County *Register*, has mostly good things to report about his experience at Whitney. The diverse student body is cohesive and purposeful. Teachers are committed and competent. Curriculum



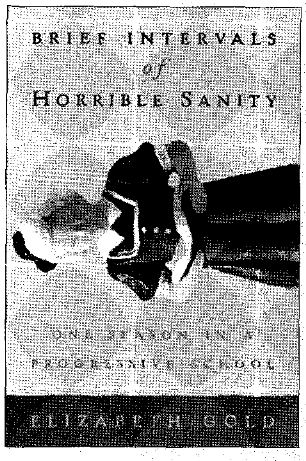
and instruction are more often engaging than not. Parents, though at times overbearing, support their children and the school. The school consistently produces some of the highest scores on state exams. Families move to Cerritos from all over the world so that their children can attend the school.

And when the school gets these kids, it seems deft in its handling of their quirks and adolescent acts of defiance. When a student known for outlandish dress and provocative accessories (such as an Army ammunition box turned lunchbox) began carting a beach chair to classes, her teachers conferred with the principal, who remarked, "If she's doing her work and not disrupting the class, I don't care if she stands on her head."

Later we see a teacher struggling to engage her initially indifferent and distracted students in a discussion of the First Amendment. She tries one tactic after another, until she finally connects when a student's vague memory of Horatio Alger stories from U.S. history resonates with her class full of immigrants and children of immigrants. The discussion finally takes off. The skill and persistence of its teachers are another reason why, from the classroom up, Whitney seems to have cracked the code: a diverse, comprehensive high school in a modest facility and below average per pupil allocation that not only works, but excels. It seems almost too good to be true.

Unfortunately, it is. For there is one other secret to Whitney's success: it is a selective school. Because of its genesis as a quasi-experimental school (founded in the 1970s), it won the prerogative to admit students from the district based on fit and aptitude. The policy resulted almost immediately in a brain drain from nearby schools. But Whitney survived the backlash that ensued and has grown more competitive ever since.

The place works because everyone wants desperately to be there. This not only makes Whitney anomalous, it also results in its own perversities, mostly in the form of hypercompetitiveness and sometimes overwhelming stress on the part of students, who resort to strategies for survival that undermine faculty efforts to make their learning meaningful. The school's drama teacher sums it up to a group of first-year teachers: "We have great kids here, wonderful students.... [But] you gotta remember. Some of our kids cheat. Big time." The foregoing classroom examples notwithstanding, Humes observes repeatedly the ways in which pressures of Whitney's overheated academic culture interfere with students' education.


BRIEF INTERVALS of HORRIBLE SANITY
ONE SEASON IN A PROGRESSIVE SCHOOL
ELIZABETH GOLD

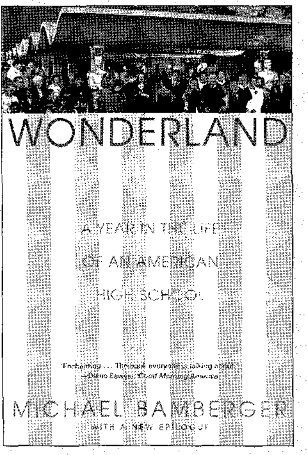
While Whitney offers a fine example of what a school can be when it takes advantage of the opportunity provided by a student body that comes to school ready and willing to learn, it provides few guideposts for those working in schools where students are neither so ready nor so willing.

Taking New York

Which brings us to Elizabeth Gold, an out-of-work writer who took a job as a 9th-grade teacher in the pseudonymous School of the New Millennium, in New York City, in the spring of 2000. The resulting book, *Brief Intervals of Horrible Sanity: One Season in a Progressive School,* is not especially well written, and some critics have complained that she betrayed the school and its students by writing her book without their knowledge and consent. It deserves a reading, however, because of what it reveals about the inner workings of an urban school self-consciously created as a better alternative for students without the advantages of their counterparts at Whitney.

What Gold encounters in this alternative school is discouraging: ill-prepared and resistant students, discipline and attendance problems, curriculum incoherence, high-minded professional jargon obscuring compromised expectations, teaching quality driven largely by individual charisma, inadequate professional mentorship, little parental support, a conscientious but overwhelmed principal and staff, racial tensions, union issues, dilapidated facilities, a general spirit of malaise. As a teacher, Gold struggles to establish authority in her classes and generally fails, through hubris and rookie ineptitude; her students ritually defy her, going so far as to openly declare their intention to get her fired for the sheer sport of it. Her principal and colleagues do their best to advise her on the fly, but they are too overextended themselves to provide sustained guidance. A gnawing sense of futility sets in.

New Millennium's staff members are laudable. Most deliberately chose to work there because they wanted to serve disadvantaged students and because they thought they could do so more effectively in an alternative setting governed by a well-developed sense of what constitutes "best practices" unfettered by bureaucratic constraints. Gold documents what all this translates into in practice. Her colleagues admonish her to "teach students not subjects"; they cajole their students with frequent reminders that they are the "leaders of tomorrow"; they defer to students' "learning styles," talk ceaselessly about diversity and culture and self-esteem, and remind one another that "every child is a learner, every child must be reached." As Gold's own difficulties mount, and as she observes how unevenly her colleagues apply these nostrums, they begin to ring hollow to her. To the reader who comes to New Millennium after Burkett's Prior Lake, they also ring familiar: while Prior Lake drew on a more muddled mix of proposed remedies to its woes, in general its leadership and staff had internalized the same normative vocabulary as those at New Millennium, with similarly mixed results. The reader fluent in education argot and familiar with the warp and woof of high-school life can't help but wonder whether the alternative differs much from the status quo.



A Wistful Past in Fairless Hills

The despondent reformer might be tempted to turn for succor to *Wonderland: A Year in the Life of an American High School*, by Michael Bamberger. A writer for *Sports Illustrated*, Bamberger spent the 2002–03 school year tracking students and teachers at his alma mater, Pennsbury High School, a nonselective school in Fairless Hills, Pennsylvania, a small, mostly white working-class town eight miles southwest of Trenton, New Jersey.

Similar to Prior Lake in both size and demographics, Bamberger's Pennsbury seems a throwback to a time when working folk led prosperous lives and built thriving communities around local institutions like the public high school. The students themselves experience the same difficulties as kids in the other schools profiled. Two seniors, Rob and Stephanie, face an out-of-wedlock birth; Bobby Speer, captain of the football team, needs an athletic scholarship to attend college, but has a mediocre season as well as a complicated home life, including an absent father and a younger brother who was born with spina bifida.

Yet most of the students at Pennsbury do not seem to exhibit the penchant for willful defiance that features so prominently in some of the other books, and at year's end most things turn out all right. In this respect, *Wonderland* is a refreshing read. Upbeat, optimistic, apolitical, willing to showcase what's good in today's high schools where most commentators carp about what's wrong, Bamberger makes the reader forget to notice that in the course of 214 pages he scarcely mentions anything having to do with the core academic mission of the school. In fact, the entire book is organized around the yearlong effort that goes into planning for the prom, which, having been showcased once in *Reader's Digest*, is nationally famous for its extravagance.

Though Bamberger tends to focus on the most sociable, self-motivated, and resourceful students, the more engaged and caring teachers, and their extracurricular passions, there is an important lesson here for the career reformer: those aspects of schooling that our wonkish tendencies decry as trivial distractions—proms, sports, parades—serve as important glue, bonding school, students, and communities. We ignore them at our peril. Nonetheless, the book's upbeat tone should not distract us from the fact that it provides no insight into how to improve day-to-day instruction.

Policy Lessons

Most of these authors attempt to conclude with some insights about the meaning of high school and suggestions for how to improve it. Maran offers a five-point plan focused on desegregation, better pay for teachers, and more community and family involvement. Good ideas, certainly, but nothing new. And though Humes is nuanced in his handling of the tensions internal to Whitney, his attempt to use the school as a model for nonselective schools is fanciful.

Gold and Burkett take different tacks, focusing less on what's wrong with the schools and more on what's wrong with efforts to reform them.

Each news-making catastrophe, each new lawsuit, each new professional fad, reform campaign, or organized interest group brings with it a new set of imperatives, which schools must struggle to sort, reconcile, and implement.

Both observe the contradictory demands placed on schools by multiple constituencies and the contradictions within some of those constituencies. Gold notes, for example, how the demand that urban schools intervene directly to overcome the effects of poverty on achievement results in a proliferation of site-based social-service programs—clinics, counseling, rehab centers, family interventions—whose maintenance can overwhelm the instructional mission of the school. "No wonder providing intellectual instruction gets lost in the shuffle," she quips after quoting a colleague's observation that "90 percent of what I do is social work anyway."

Burkett is more searing. She convincingly captures the multiple problems and equally numerous proposed remedies that schools are contending with and attempting to make sense of: zero-tolerance policies and self-esteem curricula, standardized testing and grade inflation, back-to-basics mandates, and calls for more cooperative learning. She recognizes how each news-making catastrophe (like Columbine), each new lawsuit, each new professional fad, reform campaign, or organized interest group brings with it a new set of imperatives, which schools must struggle to sort, reconcile, and implement. "Ultimately," she writes, "it's a miracle that schools like Prior Lake can function at all when we, as a nation, haven't decided what we want them to be or do, but feel free to beat them up for not meeting all our contradictory expectations."

Burkett and Gold seem to be saying that despite considerable success at galvanizing reform elites around a vision of high academic standards for all, the overall environment that high-school educators have to negotiate is no more coherent or manageable today than it was 20 years ago. This is a critical insight. The observation is not that government is inept at running schools or that teachers are incompetent or lazy. It is not that schools are underfunded or inequitably funded or that racism and poverty are too overwhelming to overcome. At the end of the day, she argues, the high schools we have are the high schools we've asked for. From inside the echo chamber—universities, think tanks, foundations, professional associations, and business alliances—it's easy to believe that a consensus exists over what's wrong with high schools and what they ought to be. It doesn't. Not yet. And this remains arguably the greatest hidden impediment to the sorts of changes those of us inside the echo chamber seek.

The second big insight to emerge from these books is the degree to which students themselves sabotage their own education. The reform literature shies away from an honest examination of this, preferring instead to portray the students as ill-served victims of an uncaring, unfair system. Maran's profile shows that the reform literature has a point. To suggest, though, that students themselves bear some responsibility for the quality of their education is tantamount to blaming the victim. So it is with growing dismay that, despite reading about many hard-working and sometimes overstressed students, one comes across story after story in these books of others who openly, defiantly, even gleefully prey on inexperienced teachers or assiduously resist everything their teachers do to reach out to them. It is distressing to see how hard many of the teachers in these pages work to engage their classes and how often, unless they stumble into something serendipitous or have extraordinary finesse and charisma, things go bust. These accounts reveal a crisis of authority at the heart of schooling so far unaddressed by the usual policy remedies.

High schools are incoherent. Teacher quality is uneven. Deep structural inequities contribute powerfully to unequal opportunities for students. These and other well-documented causes of failure are confirmed within the pages of these engaging books. But being blissfully unaware of the taboos that constrain the professional reform discourse, these authors also have license to observe what those of us within the echo chamber cannot: that the kids themselves, and many of the adults who claim to speak on their behalf, are too often their own worst enemies.

David Ferrero is director of research and evaluation for education programs at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The views expressed in this article are his and do not represent those of the foundation.

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Muggles, Broomsticks, Quidditch, and Owls That Deliver Mail

A Cast of Characters to Breathe Life—and the Magic of Good Writing —into Children's Literature

Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince

By J. K. Rowling

Scholastic Press, 2005, $29.99; 652 pages.

As reviewed by Diane Ravitch

Not long after the release of *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, the sixth Harry Potter book, worldwide sales for the series topped 270 million copies. Not only has the Harry Potter series broken all sales records for books, but also it has shattered a host of preconceptions about the kinds of materials children are willing to read. Conventional wisdom has long held that new technologies render books obsolete. Publishers of educational materials long ago concluded that today's media-saturated children do not like to read and that they require a dizzying array of graphics on each page to hold their attention. Experts in children's literature have been saying for many years that children want to read only about children who look like themselves and about situations that reflect their own lives. In the young-adult literature market, the watchword for book marketing and for authors has been "relevance." Young adults, it was widely believed, want to read about contemporaries who are struggling with contemporary problems in contemporary settings. A quarter of a billion books by J. K. Rowling say that they are all wrong.

Can So Many Kids Be Wrong?

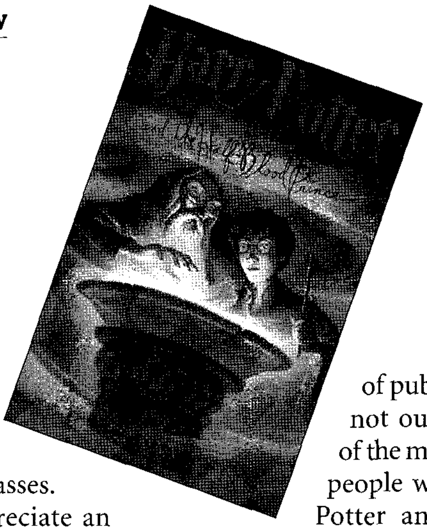
Who is this Harry Potter, and why do so many millions of children (and adults) stand in line to buy the latest installment of his adventures? I have my own views about this, which I will expound upon in a minute, but I thought I would first report what my grandson Aidan said. Aidan, 11, has read all of the Potter books and knows every detail about every character. He likes the books, he said, "because they have action, surprise, suspense, and magic spells."

By now, the whole literate world knows the basic storyline of the Harry Potter epic. Harry is an orphan; his parents were killed by the evil Lord Voldemort when Harry was a year old (the jagged scar on his forehead is a memento of this fearsome event). He lives unhappily with his mean relatives, the Dursleys. At the invitation of a great wizard, Harry has been enrolled in Hogwarts, a boarding school for wizards, where he develops intense friendships and learns to use his magical powers. Voldemort, who represents the dark side of the magic world, wants to kill Harry and assert his evil dominion (the other wizards are so frightened of Voldemort that they call him "he-who-must-not-be-named"). Because of his special powers and his goodness, Harry is the only one who can defeat Voldemort. In the first book, Harry is 11; each book covers another year of adventures and explores the pedagogy of wizardry at Hogwarts. The series is supposed to conclude with the next book, which will describe Harry's seventh and last year, at which time all of the puzzles associated with the evil Lord Voldemort will be resolved.

What are the attractions of these books for their readers? They have a lot of action. They are extremely well plotted. The plot line involves numerous subplots, each of which touches on the fate of Harry and his friends. Some of the characters are highly sympathetic, others are villainous. Harry and his friends are realistic, seeming like any children of their age. The whole story is situated in a particular place (England), with its particular language and idioms. Yet once the characters board the train for Hogwarts at King's Cross Station in London, they enter an alternative universe, one that is magical, fantastical, and utterly different from reality.

At Hogwarts, there are games that are found nowhere else ("quidditch" is the school-wide field competition, played in the air on broomsticks). There is a special vocabulary used only by wizards (nonwizards are known as "muggles"). Fantastic things happen: there are portraits that move and talk, ghosts that are friendly, and owls that deliver the mail. At Hogwarts, students of wizardry learn such subjects as potions, spells, defense against the dark arts, and other subjects necessary for students of wizardry. The line between fantasy and reality is constantly crossed; students worry about exams, and their teachers are as warm or caustic as teachers in an ordinary school. But unlike a regular school, the teachers might turn out to be deadly enemies, secret disciples of the evil Voldemort. The devotees of the Harry Potter novels quickly master the special language of Hogwarts, of course, and there are many web sites on which readers discuss their theories about what might happen next.

Although the Harry Potter novels are written for preadolescents and adolescents, they apparently have a substantial adult following. Now that the books are treated as a cultural and commercial phenomenon, each new one receives respectful reviews by major critics. What matters most about the Harry Potter books, I think, is that they demonstrate the power of literature to captivate the age group that is



considered least likely to read: adolescents. J. K. Rowling does not condescend to her readers with a dumbed-down vocabulary or a simple plot. She does not rely on glitzy visuals to grab their attention. Her books have few graphics: a simple black-and-white line drawing introduces each chapter, and everything else is text. Rowling expects her readers to read: the latest book has 652 pages. Rowling has a faith in the power of language that our own National Council of Teachers of English seems to have lost.

Somehow millions of Harry Potter fans manage to complete every book without benefit of leading questions, a teacher's guide, previsioning, or any of the other junk pedagogical strategies that burden American schoolchildren in their English classes. They respond to and appreciate an author who is a powerful storyteller with a terrific imagination.

It is sad that many schools avoid the Harry Potter books in order to placate certain religious sects that oppose any reference to magic and witchcraft. Under such pressures, the publishers of reading books for our schools exclude any stories that involve fantasy and illusion. The Harry Potter books have often appeared on the American Library Association's list of the most-banned books. This is enough to keep them out of public schools, but not out of the hearts of the millions of young people who love Harry Potter and despise the small-minded Dursleys, who ride with Harry on the train to Hogwarts, cheer for him as he leads his quidditch team to victory, stand alongside him as he challenges the forces of evil, and pray that he survives the violent confrontation with Lord Voldemort that inevitably lies ahead.

Diane Ravitch is research professor of education at New York University and a member of the Koret Task Force at the Hoover Institution, Stanford University.

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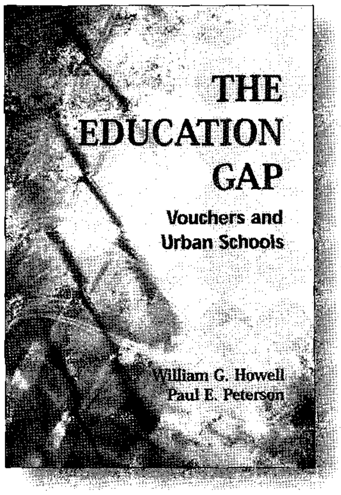

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The Joy of Gaming

How to Get Smart without Really Trying

Everything Bad Is Good for You: How Today's Popular Culture Is Actually Making Us Smarter

By Steven Johnson

Riverhead Books, 2005, $23.95; 238 pages.

As reviewed by Nathan Glazer

Everything Bad Is Good for You. Is this title a joke? The subtitle suggests it could be. And the book's epigraph is from the movie *Sleeper*, in which a scientist of the world of the future ponders Woody Allen on reawakening after a hundred years of sleep and requesting "wheat germ, organic honey, and tiger's milk." "You mean," says the bemused scientist, "there was no deep fat? No steak or cream pies or ... hot fudge?"

Steven Johnson is a very able science journalist. He has already written a solid book on the brain (*Mind Wide Open*), conveying the latest wisdom in the field of neuroscience. He knows what he would be up against in making a case that video games and current TV sitcoms, dramas, and reality shows have some redeeming value in enhancing the mind.

Nonetheless, Johnson does claim in *Everything Bad Is Good for You* that those unlikely contributions to our culture, the video game and the commercial TV program, are doing something good for our minds. Reaching out to those committed to the older culture, the book, he writes, "is an old-fashioned work of persuasion, that ultimately aims to convince of one thing: that popular culture has, on average, grown more complex and intellectually challenging over the last thirty years." Note the words "old-fashioned" and "persuasion." He acknowledges that he could never make his argument in the form of a video game or TV show: it takes a book to make the case.

Appealing to those who are horrified by the new culture, he offers as an analogy Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* or, worse, the world of E. M. Forster (from "The Machine Stops," published in 1909): "Imagine, if you can, a small room, hexagonal in shape, like the cell of a bee. It is lighted neither by window nor by lamp, yet it is filled with a soft radiance. There are no apertures for ventilation, yet the air is fresh. There are no musical instruments, and yet ... this room is throbbing with melodious sounds. An arm-chair is at the centre, by its side a reading-desk. And in the arm-chair there sits a swaddled lump of flesh." Very much like the rooms inhabited by players of an endless video game, no? Well, no, argues Johnson.

The mind, Johnson argues from his studies of neuroscience, demands challenges, and the new media provide them.

What Kind of Intelligence?

Video games, Johnson tells us, are complicated and becoming ever more complicated. They stretch areas of the mind that a book might not engage. Johnson uses the terms "probing" and "telescoping" to describe the mental activities exercised in playing games. It seems there is much in the games that is hidden by design and that has to be divined if the game is to proceed. (I follow Johnson's account; I have never seen a video game.) The games set tasks that require solving earlier tasks, which require solving still earlier tasks, almost ad infinitum. This is "telescoping." So:

"To locate the items, you need the pearl of Din from the islanders.... To get this, you need to help them solve their problems. To do this, you need to cheer up the Prince. To do this, you need to get a letter from the girl.... "

The sequence "for this one objective" from the video game "Zelda" goes on for almost two pages before Johnson writes, "I'll spare you the entire sequence."

If you find this to be nonsense and are mystified at how grown, or even half-grown, human beings can devote hour after hour to this (there are guide books to these games—Johnson refers to one that runs to 53,000 words—and also Internet sites for discussion and analysis), read on. Johnson is clever at arguing on behalf of the kind of mental exercise these games involve. According to the author, this string of tasks for persons about whom we know nothing and care little is like the kind of question that might be on an intelligence test. For example, you are presented with the problem of "Simon," who has a hundred tags, numbered 1 to 100, and is drawing them out at random. You are asked, What is the likelihood he will draw number 21 on his 100th try? You know nothing of Simon, why he is confronted with his hundred tags, or what his state of mind is. But that's not the point. It's not literature; it is a test.

I find it far-fetched to consider the probability example as a parallel to the video game's tasks. There is, after all, a correct answer in the probability question, in a sense different from the correct solution to a task in a video game. But Johnson ingeniously recasts the video's string of tasks directly into a multiple-choice question:

"You need to cross a gorge to reach a valuable destination. At one end of the gorge a large rock stands in front of the river, blocking the flow of water ...," and so on, to the multiple choices with which you are confronted.

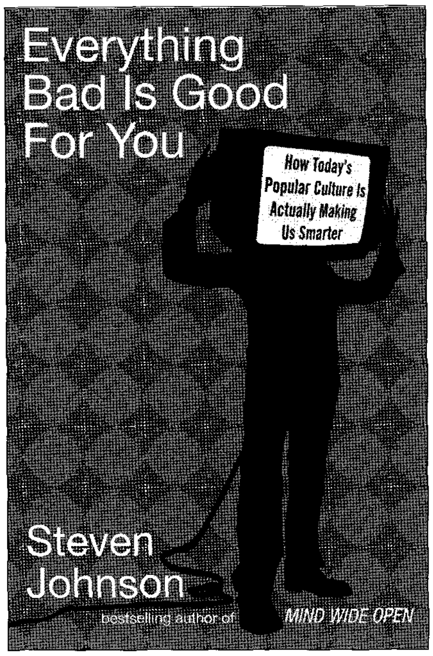
But this reworking of a series of tasks in a video game is still far from an intelligence-test challenge. There is an arbitrariness in the problem set, the conditions described, and the solution the game is designed to have the player choose. I don't find this in questions testing the understanding of grammar or arithmetic.

Johnson thinks that both the probability questions and the video game's tasks are "good for the mind on some fundamental level: they teach abstract skills in probability, in pattern recognition, in understanding causal relations.... "

I remain skeptical. He has made his case that the games are far more complicated than they were 10 or 20 years ago; but what this complexity is good for, except longer games, remains unclear to me.

The Vast Playland

Johnson's case for TV is stronger. He demonstrates directly, using charts of interactions among characters, that some of the most popular TV dramas and sitcoms have become more complicated and demanding: multiple stories are being told at the same time, and viewers are required to keep in mind more complex and far-reaching networks of personal relations. He even makes a case for reality shows like "The



Apprentice," which are discussed on Internet sites, and on which difficult ethical issues might be debated.

In the second half of the book Johnson makes his case that all this is "good for you" by going to developments in the larger society that we would not ordinarily connect with the new media. Thus average IQ scores are increasing even as video games become ever more popular. Johnson refers to the research of James Flynn and others on this increase, though I do not believe any of the researchers ascribe this increase to video games or the increasing complexity of some products of the mass media. If we are reading less (Johnson concedes this), why do IQ tests show that we are getting smarter? We may not be getting higher scores when the tests use traditional cultural content (one can't learn that from the video games and the TV shows), but we are apparently getting better at other kinds of tests, such as Raven Matrices, which test for logic, pattern recognition, and task completion.

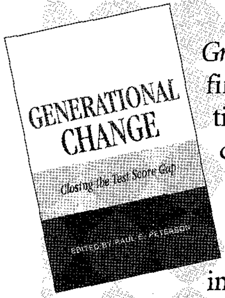
Johnson takes no stand on the argument that the increasing use of violence and sex in the games and on TV is having deleterious effects on society, but he does note the drop in murder and crime generally that has occurred in tandem with the rise of the video game (and he might also have pointed to the drop in teenage pregnancies). The mind, Johnson argues from his studies of neuroscience, demands challenges, and the new media provide them. "We are not innate slackers," he writes, "drawn inexorably to the least offensive and least complicated entertainment available. All around us the world of mass entertainment grows more demanding and sophisticated, and our brains happily gravitate to that newfound complexity."

What to make of this? Johnson has a case when he talks about improvement in abilities independent of content, and in this sense he reminds me of those who say that education and schooling should be a matter of how to think rather than what one thinks about. Yet I cannot help but conclude that thinking about stealing cars (for example, the very popular "Grand Theft Auto") or finding imaginary hidden jewels is less helpful as education than thinking about the problems of characters in well-formed novels, or issues in current politics, or real history. It is a reprise of the debate between E. D. Hirsch's "cultural literacy"—induction into our culture, our issues, our debates—and the so-called skills that can be addressed to anything, or nothing. In this I stand with those who want our culture to be part of our education. And even if video games are now "part of our culture," some parts of our culture are more worthy than others.

Nathan Glazer is professor emeritus of education and sociology at Harvard University.

BOOK ALERT

Generational Change: Closing the Test Score Gap. Edited by Paul Peterson (Rowman & Littlefield).



In the controversial 2003 *Grutter v. Bollinger* decision, finding for the constitutionality of race-conscious college admissions policies, Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor declared that increasing the number of minority students with high grades and test scores meant, "We expect that 25 years from now, the use of racial preferences will no longer be necessary." Her pronouncement threw a hot potato into the lap of America's K–12 schools.

In *Generational Change*, editor Paul Peterson (who also edits this journal) and a stellar lineup of scholars examine the causes of the racial achievement gap and ponder what it will take to close it. In his provocative introduction, Peterson critiques the cultural changes of the past 15 years, setting the tone for this volume. Shrugging aside pieties about desegregation, preschool, and the notion that schools serving black children are struggling against insuperable odds, authors such as Roland Fryer, Steven Levitt, David Armor, Ronald Haskins, and Derek Neal describe the limited value of favored remedies and provide concrete alternatives to the status quo. This careful volume provides a roadmap for policymakers and educators who are serious about responding to O'Connor's charge.

Divided by God: America's Church-State Problem—And What We Should Do About It. Noah Feldman (Farrar, Straus, and Giroux).

Back from an overseas stint helping draft a new Iraqi constitution, Noah Feldman, a prolific NYU law professor, offers new advice on interpreting our own Constitution. He worries that Americans, including those on the Supreme Court, are increasingly divided on the proper relationship between religion and government. To minimize tensions, he would have us allow more room for religious symbols in public debate while banning public funds for religious institutions and activities, including vouchers for religious schools.

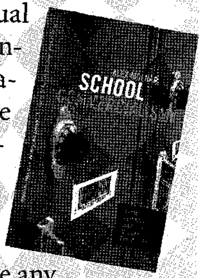
NOAH FELDMAN
DIVIDED
BY GOD

Feldman's compromise points in the opposite direction from recent Supreme Court precedent, and he argues for it mainly on historical grounds. He shows that many of the framers believed all tax-funded support for religious institutions violated citizens' liberty of conscience. Meanwhile, the ugly 19th-century debates over the funding of Catholic schools, in his view, reveal the drawbacks of letting the government determine which religious institutions should receive public support.

True enough, but Feldman fails to cast as critical an eye on the alternative, which is to force all those who can't afford a private education into public schools, where ongoing conflicts over the teaching of evolution, school prayer, and other religion-infused issues have done little to foster religious harmony.

School Commercialism: From Democratic Ideal to Market Commodity. Alex Molnar (Routledge).

Ardent market skeptic Alex Molnar lambastes firms like Pizza Hut and Papa John's for providing rewards to students who meet their reading goals or earn passing grades. On the one hand, this is a semihysterical volume with chapter titles like "Eat, Drink, and Be Diabetic: Using Schools to Promote Illness". On the other hand, Molnar's effort provides plenty of data, and that part of the book is more useful than the conspiracy-mongering. Many readers from across the ideological spectrum will sympathize with Molnar's concern that "commercialism has transformed American childhood and the institutions that serve children." More troubling is his suggestion that for-profit tutors, virtual schooling, and education-management organizations are destructive forces that are no different from efforts to expand school-based marketing. Ultimately, Molnar doesn't propose any solutions that are not condemnations of "corporations" and "privatization"—nor is it clear that he really believes that troubled schools can be "democratizing civic institutions" if only we can roll back contemporary commercialism.



Schooling America: How the Public Schools Meet the Nation's Changing Needs. Patricia Albjerg Graham (Oxford).

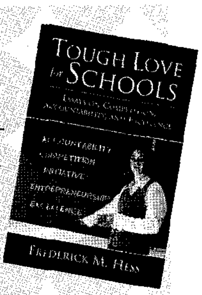
Education historian Patricia Albjerg Graham has penned a sweeping, readable history of American schooling in the 20th century. She argues that schooling has shifted over the decades from an emphasis on "assimilation" in the early 1900s; to a focus on access in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s; to an embrace of achievement in the most recent era. *Schooling America* also traces the evolution of a chaotic, autonomous system of higher education to one marked increasingly by a commitment to accountability and the ideal of the research university.

Schooling America
HOW THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS MEET THE NATION'S CHANGING NEEDS
Patricia Albjerg Graham

This is a volume marked by personal touches. In a chapter beginning in 1900, the author gives us a description of her father's first day of school. But Graham also pays much attention to individual reformers and decisionmakers. The book is more notable for its scholarship than for the author's cautious conclusions, such as her observation that report cards for elementary, secondary, and higher education may not be worthwhile. Her only clear programmatic recommendation is that the nation needs to invest more in education research. Graham's book may not do much to illuminate the future, but it provides a cogent look at how we got to the present.

Tough Love for Schools: Essays on Competition, Accountability, and Excellence. Edited by Frederick M. Hess (AEI Press).

Hess, of the American Enterprise Institute (and *Education Next*), has compiled a rewarding set of 20 essays (several of them coauthored) addressing four urgent education issues—leadership and public education; competition and accountability; the politics of school reform; teachers and principals—and a miscellaneous category that he terms "the road ahead." His extensive introduction includes an uncommonly candid (and germane) personal history that traces the evolution of his thinking on these challenges. Although such collections are invariably uneven, and some entries sit awkwardly alongside others written at different times for different audiences, Hess is a stimulating thinker whose intellectual hegira and policy evolution are worth watching. He's also a lucid and prolific writer. Particularly worthy here are his insights on "what's public about public education," his review of both the promise and the limits of school choice, and his formulation of a tough-love strategy for reforming institutions that are constitutionally averse to change.



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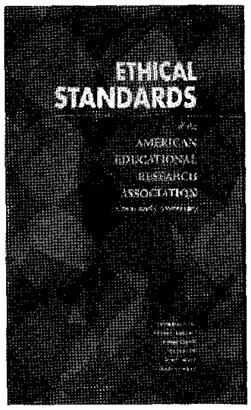

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A Trip to the Rose Garden

The Student Who Taught Me How to Teach

BY JASON KAMRAS

I was 22 and straight out of my Teach For America training when I met Wendall. It was 1996, and he was an 11-year-old 6th grader in my very first class. He immediately caught my eye because he had a proclivity for being "off task." I thought he might be suffering from Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), but, as I watched Wendall more closely in class over the next several weeks, I realized that he could, if he so desired, work for long stretches with great concentration. He didn't have ADHD. He simply wasn't sure what to make of me and so set out to challenge me, to see if he could trust me.

In doing this, Wendall would turn out to be one of my greatest teachers.

I was smart enough that first week to know that I had much to learn. So I turned to the ultimate source of information about Wendall: his mother. Mrs. Jefferson informed me that her son had been a successful student in the elementary grades, but had become involved in activities outside of school that were taking him down a less-positive path.

When I asked her how to approach Wendall, she gave me the most important piece of education advice I may ever have received: be firm with him, but simultaneously "reach out" and connect, in a meaningful way, beyond math lessons.

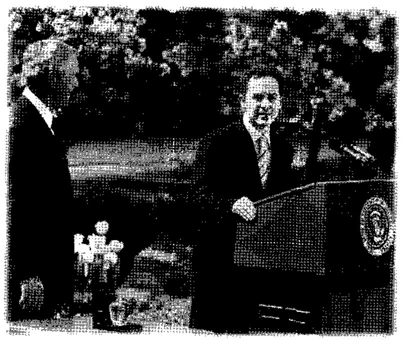

PHOTO / COURTESY JASON KAMRAS

I agreed, as a consequence of my defeat, to proclaim to the class: "Wendall is a chess beast. He beat me five times in a row."

When I learned that Wendall had earned honors in elementary school for his chess acumen, I invited him to play a few matches after school in an effort to get to know him better, as his mother had suggested. I must admit I was startled that first afternoon when Wendall defeated me match after match after match.

Even more humiliating, the next day I agreed, as a consequence of my defeat, to proclaim to the class: "Wendall is a chess beast. He beat me five times in a row."

But this minor embarrassment was worth the reward of having made even the smallest connection with one of my students. Things weren't always easy thereafter. We had our ups and downs. There was the afternoon at the end of the first quarter when I informed Wendall that he had made the Honor Roll, and there was the afternoon a few weeks later when I had to temporarily suspend our after-school tutoring sessions because he refused to follow my class rules. But we persevered—together.

Even after he left my 6th-grade class, we would meet in the afternoons to play chess, go over math assignments, or just talk about music, movies, or politics. He matured quite a bit during his middle-school years, and when 8th-grade graduation finally arrived, Wendall walked across the stage as class valedictorian. He then went on to Banneker Senior High School, one of Washington, D.C.'s flagship academic schools.

Throughout Wendall's high-school years, we kept working together, first on math, and then on many other subjects. We also read and analyzed nonschool novels, and we explored museums across the city.

After his sophomore year, in an act of incredible loyalty, Wendall decided to leave Banneker and move to his neighborhood high school in order to watch over his younger brother, a young man who, like Wendall years earlier, had begun to go down a negative path. I was particularly moved by this as I have two brothers myself.

But Wendall never let go of his own dreams. After years of hard work and an SAT score in the mid-1300s, he is now a 20-year-old junior at Morehouse College with his sights set on Columbia University's prestigious postgraduate engineering program. Last April, he honored me, more profoundly than he will ever know, by flying up from Atlanta to be in the Rose Garden when the president presented me with the National Teacher of the Year award.

I'm honestly not sure who helped whom the most over the past nine years. I know one thing for sure. I certainly would not have been standing in the Rose Garden last April had it not been for Wendall. He made me the teacher I am.

Jason Kamras is a mathematics teacher at John Philip Sousa Middle School, a District of Columbia public school, and the 2005 National Teacher of the Year.

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***************************AUTO**5-DIGIT 94301
10070 XXXX                 1    261
Ron K Unz                    105
No. 371
555 Bryant St
Palo Alto CA  94301-1704
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